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Jesus
Christ
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By

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JESUS CHRIST AND HIS SURROUNDINGS

JESUS CHRIST AND HIS SURROUNDINGS

BY THE REV.

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE object aimed at in the following pages is not to add another to the many Lives of Christ. It is simply so far to describe His environment—to give some account of the various agencies and influences with which He was brought into contact. In attempting to do this the Gospels have been exclusively followed, and that without any pretence to a deeper knowledge than what ordinary readers possess.

One thing only may be added in the way of explanation. It is that in several instances the same incidents are repeated—the reason being that they are fitted to serve the purpose of illustrating different aspects in the Saviour's character or history.

NORMAN L. WALKER.

CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| I | |
| | PAGE |
| THE NATURAL WORLD . . . | I |
| II | |
| THE WORLD OF SPIRITS . . . | 19 |
| III | |
| THE OUTLYING RACES . . . | 40 |
| IV | |
| HIS KINSFOLK AND FRIENDS . . | 60 |
| V | |
| THE CHURCH AND STATE OF HIS DAY . | 83 |
| VI | |
| WHAT IGNORANCE HE MÉT WITH . . | 106 |

| | PAGE |
|--------------------------|------|
| VII | |
| AMONG THE POOR | 122 |
| VIII | |
| WITH THE RICH | 134 |
| IX | |
| THE SICK | 146 |
| X | |
| THE CHILDREN | 158 |
| XI | |
| INQUIRERS | 172 |
| XII | |
| SIN | 195 |
| XIII | |
| SORROW | 214 |
| XIV | |
| DEATH | 228 |

CHAPTER I

THE NATURAL WORLD

IT is interesting to observe how much of Christ's earthly life was associated with the physical features of the country in which He appeared. He did not shun the habitations of men. He often taught in the temple and in synagogues and in private houses. But He was distinctively an open-air preacher, and all the important events of His history took place in what we may call the sanctuaries of Nature.

Thus He was born in a cave¹—He was baptized in a river—He was tempted in a wilderness — His most famous sermon was preached on a mountain—His most memorable parables were spoken on the seashore — His most remarkable miracle was performed in a

¹ "In one of the limestone caverns—for I see no reason for rejecting the statement of one who was born little more than a century afterwards and not forty miles from the same spot—was the Redeemer born."—ELLICOTT.

graveyard — His most impressive prophecies were spoken on a hillside—His transfiguration took place on a mountain-top—His last agonies were endured in a garden and on a tree—and while, after His resurrection, His first meeting with His disciples was in rural Galilee, the last glimpse of all that we get of His person was when it was passing out of sight into the clouds of heaven.

It is this intimate association of Christ, not with the transitory institutions of the country, but with its everlasting physical forms, which makes Palestine still a Holy Land to the Christian traveller. The temple is gone; the synagogues in which He taught are no more; there are disputes as to the very sites of the cities which He rendered famous by His ministry; but there to this day is the brook which He crossed to reach the Garden of Gethsemane; there is the mount whose base He was wont to skirt to get to Bethany; there is the rocky road leading down into the valley of the Jordan, the scene of the story of the Good Samaritan; there is the rushing river out of which He was coming when the Spirit descended upon Him like a dove; there is the inland sea on whose bosom He had so often sailed in sunshine and in storm; there, still resting in their quiet beauty, are mountains amid whose summits He spent nights in prayer; there, up among the green hills of Galilee, is the cup-like hollow in which He spent His

earlier years ; and there, as marked as ever—at the opening into the vale of Sychar—is the ancient well on which He sat in the heat of the day and begged a cup of water from a woman of Samaria.

Did He thus intentionally guard against the alliance of His name with any building reared by man in case such a structure should be turned to purposes of superstition? Or, in His desire to preserve the recollection of His residence in the world, did He designedly leave the deepest traces of His footsteps not in the cities, which were soon to be in ruins, but in the country where the landmarks remain? Or, may not this have been possible—that He, the Pure and Holy One, though frequenting much the haunts of wicked men for their good, yet loved to seek retirement and refreshment for Himself amid the innocent scenes of Nature? However we may account for it, this is true—that while the sayings and doings of the illustrious visitor who once traversed their country have faded entirely out of the recollection and traditions of the people of Palestine, and time and misfortune have swept away the towns where He performed most of His mighty works, the hills and valleys of the region and its lakes and rivers are still fragrant with memories of His life and ministry.

Whatever conclusion we may come to on that point, it is interesting to observe the place which material objects had in the teaching and

conversation of our Lord. Never did preacher, before or since, turn to such account the mine of meaning which we now know to have always lain in the heart of Nature.

Thus He called distinct attention to the BEAUTY which still gleams on its face. "Consider the lilies, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." We are mostly in the habit of interpreting this text, as if it were intended only to show the folly of over-anxiety about the future. But there is more in it than that. It is a verse which gives us a glimpse into the Speaker's mind. It reveals to us the fact, that as He walked through the fields and gardens, or scaled the mountain-sides, He took notice of the flowers which grew at His feet—that He interestedly observed their shape and colour—and that He was keenly sensible of their grace and loveliness. Nay, so impressed was He with their attractiveness, that He urged His followers to take note of what they saw. "Look," said He, "at the lily; observe its gracefulness, its purity, its beauty, its sweetness—verily I say unto you, the splendour of the greatest king is thrown into the shade beside it." We have not many incidents like this in the life of Christ, but this one is all the more precious on that account, because it shows that He not only Himself was impressed by what is beautiful in natural forms and scenery, but made it part of

His teaching that we too should look around us so as to admire.

But notice with what this appreciation of what is beautiful in Nature is associated. In the case of some such a taste leads them away from God ; in Christ's case the tendency was all the other way. That divorce of Nature from God which we so often meet in poetry, in philosophy, in science, in simple unbelief and impiety, receives no countenance in the teaching of Him who came to us from heaven. Nothing, indeed, could be more striking than the recognition which is given there to the existence of a real, personal, universally diffused Divine intelligence in the world. The Son, while here, literally saw the Father everywhere. Taking, for example, the vegetable creation, He singles out what is lowest in it—the grass of the field—and says, "God clothes *that*." His hearers might, without any pressing, have been moved to see a Divine hand in the graceful palm or in the stately cedar ; but He directs them to look far lower down, even to the common pasture, and assures them that *there*, no less than in the forests of Lebanon, are to be traced the care and handiwork of a God.

And so with the lower orders of animal life. Who cares how the raven gets its food ? Who keeps a record of how many sparrows that particular husbandman killed in the course of a year ? Who dreams of burdening himself with providing food constantly for the birds of the

6 JESUS CHRIST AND HIS SURROUNDINGS

air? The feathered tribes, that we have not domesticated, are simply nothing to us ; and, except when they molest our fruit gardens or our cornfields, or when they fill the woods with song and compel our attention, we scarcely give them a passing thought. But as Jesus Christ passed by the vineyards of Palestine, or traversed their mountain solitudes, and saw the birds finding resting-places among the rocks or nestling among the leaves of the trees, He looked at them with a peculiar and a personal interest. For they were His Father's creatures, and His Father was always thinking of them all. It was He who fed the ravens. He was looking on when yonder angry vine-dresser killed the sparrow. And all the fowls of the air, are, He knew, under His special providence. To one with such recollections as these ever present with him, how near would God always seem—how real and imminent would be His government. To Him Nature would be no screen hiding the spiritual world from view. It would, on the contrary, be a transparency through which the movements of the Lord of all would be more gloriously revealed.

But the natural world was more than all this to Christ. Not only did it everywhere manifest to Him the presence of God, He recognised in it a grand symbolic representation of Divine truths and thoughts. "Christ moved," says Archbishop Trench, "in what seemed to the eye of sense an old and worn-out world, and

it directly became new at His touch, for it told to man now the inmost recesses of his being. . . . He found that it answered, with strange and marvellous correspondence, to another world within him—that oftentimes it helped to the birth great thoughts of his heart which before were helplessly struggling to be born, and that of those two worlds without him and within, each threw a light and a glory on the other.”

If that is correct, then we may look at, for example, many of the parables of our Lord, not simply as containing arbitrary illustrations taken from Nature, of what might have been colourless and unattractive if spoken in plainer language, but as, in a manner, *interpretations* of what the material world was beforehand endeavouring to say. And Jesus is thus presented to us, not only as bringing down direct from heaven fresh truth which had never been whispered on earth before, but as taking the veil from the earth itself and enabling it to tell what it would have revealed earlier, if it had earlier enjoyed the means of adequate expression or articulation.

Following out this thought, we notice this suggestive feature in our Lord’s ministry—that He lays His hand on some of those material objects which are most familiar to us, and most indispensable to our existence and well-being, and connects them for ever with His own person and with the work of the Holy Spirit.

Thus, no one can live through the summer

and forget at any time the great LIGHT which rules the day ; and there is no one who, if it were put to him, would hesitate to speak of it as, in an eminent sense, "the light of the world." But what view is taken of this luminary in the teaching of our Lord? There we find it relegated to a second place. The title, it is indicated, can only be given to it "by courtesy," for "I," says He, "am the true Light of the World, and the sun is no more than a type, a shadow, an emblematic representation of ME."

Again, we are accustomed to speak of *Bread* as the staff of life, but that is true only in a modified sense. Long ago Moses said to the Israelites, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God"; and Jesus Christ afterwards fully revealed what was meant by that, when referring to Himself—the eternal Logos—he said, "My Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. I am the Bread of Life, he that cometh to Me shall never hunger." He is "the TRUE BREAD." You may eat your loaves of wheat or barley, and imagine that in these you have the real substantial stay of your existence ; but you will be mistaken. Underlying that bread, and related to it as the type is to the antitype—the substance to the shadow—to that which in the highest sense is alone entitled to the name—is the Living Bread, which came down from heaven.

Once more, we live in a world where the processes of vegetation are perpetually brought under our notice. We go into our gardens, and the flowers meet us ; we visit the fields, and there is the corn ; we enter the woods, and find ourselves among the trees. Has Christ here appropriated anything to symbolise himself? Yes ; taking the object which was most familiar to those with whom He was conversing—the vine (for Palestine was a country of vineyards)—He said, “I am the TRUE VINE.” That is, what you see and call by that name is but a shadow. *I* am the true, original, archetypal Vine, and all other vines are only copies or emblems of ME.

Nor was it His own person alone that He saw represented in natural types. There are two elements of Nature which He has for ever associated with the work and activity of the Holy Spirit.

First, there is the *Air* which is all around us, and which, though it is invisible in itself, is so visible in its effects. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.”

And then there is what is almost as indispensable to life—the refreshing and reviving element of WATER. “Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me, as

the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. This [the Evangelist explains]—this spake He of *the Spirit*, which they that believe on Him should receive—for the Holy Ghost was not yet given, because that Jesus was not yet glorified.”

From these illustrations it may be seen that Nature was to Jesus Christ not what it is to many—a mere storehouse of imagination from which poets may draw as fancy dictates—but was a Divine Book—a Book of Revelation—in which there was as real and fixed a sense as in the Bible itself. No one, of course, could have taught us that, authoritatively, but Himself. We might have guessed at it, but we could never have known it. Now, however, we may speak with greater confidence, and say that all around us are signs and emblems intended to bring us hourly into living contact with the persons who, so to speak, have taken the most active part in the work of human redemption. Behind the sun which daily shines upon our path—behind the bread by which we are every day sustained—behind that vegetable life which shows itself in so many forms around us, we are for ever to see that great Redeemer of whom they are all the shadows; while in the universal and beneficent agency of the air and water we are to recognise the true types or natural emblems by which we are reminded of the presence and activity of the Holy Ghost.

We have said that Jesus Christ was, dis-

tinctively, an open-air preacher. Let us see how emphatically this is confirmed by the structure of his discourses.

Look, for example, at His parables of the sower, the tares, and the rich fool and you will notice that He must often have had His eye on the various processes of agriculture.

Thus, in one a field is described, whose peculiarities He has evidently taken careful note of. A path runs through it, much trodden down beneath the feet of passers-by. Some portions of the soil are good and clean, and may be relied on to yield satisfactory returns—but in one place a rock heaves its shoulder up to within an inch or two of the surface, thereby presenting so thin a layer of soil that no plant will be able to root itself deeply in it; while in another the ground is so foul with weeds and thorns, that the corn when it grows up with them must be choked for want of air. By and by a sower enters the field, and, with a steady and thoroughgoing purpose, he traverses every part of it, scattering the grain he carries impartially over all the ridges, his steps the while being attended by flocks of birds, which alight on the footpath as he passes and gather up the corn which is left exposed upon its surface. But the interest of the Preacher does not extend only to the seed-time. The seed-corn dies, and in course of time, when the green blade appears above the ground, with what a graphic touch does He picture the consternation with which

on a certain farm the discovery is made that wheat and tares are coming up in the same field mysteriously together. Then, later on in the season, the grain ripens for the sickle—but all is not in the same condition. Some portions promise well; but here is a patch where long and lanky stalks, with little or no root, are withering in the drought; and there is another where the crop, which otherwise might have been good, is choked by an undergrowth of weeds. Finally the crops are cut down and gathered into barns, and there is a harvest-home with joy among the reapers. But the conclusion reached is not altogether satisfactory. The weeds are separated from the wheat and burnt, and while the hearts of many are full of piety and thankfulness, we get a glimpse of one ungodly farmer, who, having seen the year crowned with goodness and his storehouses bursting with abundance, says to himself, “Now, never mind the bountiful Giver of all this, but ‘take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry’”—and to whom that very night comes the solemn summons, like the handwriting on the wall, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.”

It was not, however, only in the fields that Christ found materials for the illustration of His discourses. You can see from His preaching that He must have passed observantly also through the woods and vineyards. It is said, with reference to the garden of Gethsemane,

that He *ofttimes* resorted thither with His disciples ; and He did not frequent such places without noticing what was going on in them. He had evidently followed the master vine-dresser with His eye as he went out early in the morning into the market-place to hire labourers for the day, and when he walked watchfully round his garden to see how the fruit-trees were bearing, and when he collected his workers together at sundown to pay them their wages. He observed, too, how small is the mustard-seed, and how umbrageous is the tree which springs from it ; and while the ordinary processes of applying the pruning-knife to the vine, and of digging round a fig-tree to make it bear something better than leaves were not overlooked, He took special note of what has struck many another thoughtful mind—the silence and secrecy of Nature's operations. A man anxious to penetrate the mystery of vegetation is described by Him as rising at all hours of the night to mark the changes which the plant undergoes ; but his labour is in vain—he sees results, but not processes. “The seed springeth up he knoweth not how.”

Nor is it only the fields and gardens with which we find our Lord associated. Now you see Him standing by the seaside and watching the fishermen hauling in their nets to the shore ; now He appears on the brink of one of those mountain-torrents which flood and fall with equal rapidity, and on whose banks a house to

be secure must be founded on a rock ; now He is out upon the breezy downs among the shepherds and their flocks, and marking what is peculiar in the manner of their lives—how the shepherds, for example, go before their flocks instead of driving them from behind, and how they need to guard the sheepfolds against wolves and robbers ; and elsewhere, again, He is near some farm grange and is listening to the cry of a mother hen as she calls her chickens to come under the shelter of her wings, because seeing in the sky the speck which warns her of the approach of a bird of prey.

We need not attempt to detail here the various uses that Christ made of the objects which have been referred to. It is enough to say that they all serve vividly to bring home to us the fact that Nature was a book which He constantly read, and in which He found everywhere revelations of the presence and of the mind of God.

One other example remains to be referred to of the relation sustained by our Lord to the physical world. He appears in it not simply as its interpreter, but as its Master. Men despised and rejected their Maker when He offered Himself for their acceptance ; but Nature was not so blind. In many ways it showed that it was not insensible to the glory of His presence, and it offered to Him always the most unquestionable of all kinds of homage—that of unhesitating submission to His commands.

Thus He proved more than once what tremendous efficacy there lay both in His blight and in His blessing. The simple word which He addressed to the fig-tree, "Let no fruit grow on thee henceforth and for ever," caused it to wither immediately away ; on another occasion at a marriage feast He so concentrated into one act the manifold processes of Nature as to turn in a moment the element of water into wine ; while twice over, in desert places, His simple blessing multiplied a few loaves and fishes in a way so marvellous that they made a superabundant feast for many thousands of guests.

Quite as remarkable, too, was His power over the winds and the waves—those forces which all the science and skill of men have absolutely failed to control. He walked on the surface of the sea as on dry land. An angry hurricane which swept down through the defiles of the Galilean hills and threatened the safety of the ship in which He sailed became still at His bidding. Then, too, at a similar authoritative word the billows ceased to roll, and there was a great calm. And almost yet more striking, the very fishes of the sea seemed eager to wait on Him and to sacrifice themselves in His honour—one bringing in its mouth the stater to pay His tribute-money, and shoals crowding to the nets which were cast into the depths at His command.

In a word—to use the language of St. Gregory—"The heavens knew Him, and forthwith sent

a star and a company of angels to sing His birth. . . . The sea knew Him, and made itself a way to be trodden by His feet. The sun knew Him and hid the rays of its light. The rocks knew Him, for they were rent in twain. Hades knew Him, and gave up the dead it had received. But though the senseless elements perceived Him to be their Lord, the hearts of the unbelieving Jews knew Him not as God, and, harder than the very rocks, were not rent by repentance."

McLaurin, in his famous sermon on "Glorying in the Cross of Christ," follows in the same line of thought. "The frame of Nature," he says, "solemnised the death of its Author. Heaven and earth were mourners. The sun was clad in black, and if the inhabitants of the earth were unmoved the earth itself trembled under the awful load. There were few to pay the Jewish compliment of rending their garments, but the rocks were not so insensible—they rent their bowels. He had not a grave of His own, but other men's graves opened to Him. Death and the grave might be proud of such a tenant in their territories, but He came not there as a subject, but as an invader, a conqueror. It was there the King of Terrors lost his sting, and on the third day the Prince of Life triumphed over him, spoiling death and the grave."

But, after all, it may be asked, what good does it do us now to know that the relation of Christ to Nature was so intimate and so interesting? We answer that there is much advantage every way.

For one thing, do not the facts that have been noticed tend to give a brighter face to this very material world of ours? May we not say that the yet traceable footprints of the Redeemer upon it have in some manner obliterated the trail of the serpent; and that now the hope is held out to us that, though it still groans under the burden of the curse, there is a good time coming, when it will receive a new consecration from the hands of its Creator?

Then the story we have been telling gives, undoubtedly, the highest possible sanction to a kind of enjoyment in which minds of a refined type have found intensest pleasure, but which an unreasoning fanaticism has sometimes frowned upon as if there were actually something heathenish in it—the enjoyment arising from the contemplation of natural scenery.

We may learn, too, from the character of the teaching reported in the Gospels, how much of truth and meaning is treasured up in the great storehouse whose doors open on every side of us; and also how these doors may be entered with hope of the greatest possible benefit and advantage.

Finally we have set before us, in a peculiarly bright and attractive way, the personal glory of Jesus Christ. How genuinely and touchingly human, for example, does His life appear, as we see it reflecting so directly and so sympathisingly, just the very everyday world which we see around us! Not living in an inaccessible

region of His own—too much absorbed in the work of His own great mission to notice anything but what bore in some grand way on its development—He condescends to speak of such trifles as the birds following the steps of the sower and the hen calling her chickens to come under the shelter of her wing ; and though there was no sorrow like unto His sorrow, His spirit instead of being drowned in it, remained sufficiently sweet and collected to allow of His being affected by the beauty of the lily. Such an High Priest became us. We needed one with whom we could have a feeling of brotherhood—one who should not merely be like us on account of our having similar trials, but who should show that he understood and sympathised with the whole range and current of our thoughts.

But if the true humanity of Jesus appears in this connection, so also does His divinity. There was no feature in the face of Nature with which Christ did not show Himself to be acquainted, and as a man easily deciphers his own handwriting, though it is utterly illegible to others, so he read off, with an infinite facility, all the meaning which He Himself—the Creator—had originally placed there. If, then, those were ever successful who turned from the written Word to seek God in the Book of Nature, it would be because they would there discover that the God of Nature is really no other than He who died upon the cross.

CHAPTER II

THE WORLD OF SPIRITS

IT is the infidel theory that there is no intelligence actively at work in the world except that of its human inhabitants. According to this view there is, of course, no devil; and if there is a God it is a long time since He set the world a-spinning and retired to a distant sphere, from which He now looks on as a virtually unconcerned spectator. As for those angelic messengers who are supposed by some to be for ever engaged about us in a ministry of love, the story of their doings is assumed to be as fabulous as that of the water-sprites which were once believed to haunt our streams, or of the fairies that have been supposed to dance by moonlight in the greenwood.

Revelation, in opposition to all this, teaches that more servants wait on man than he takes note of—that the earth is under the immediate providential government of a Supreme Being—and that, mingling incessantly in the affairs of human life, are hosts of supernatural intelli-

gence whose influence is for good or evil as their nature is diabolical or angelical.

When we turn to the life of Jesus Christ, we find that His experience was strikingly confirmatory of this last view. As we follow His footsteps we see Him in constant contact with a spirit-world.

In the first place the gospel story speaks of angels as from the first taking the keenest interest in the personal career of Jesus, and in the redemption scheme which He came to execute. He is said, for instance, to have been "seen of angels"—that is, to have been the object of their observant study; and with regard to the phenomena connected with His great work, they are described as having had a "desire to look" into them. These references are in the Epistles, but when we go back to the actual history we find them confirmed and illustrated in a most remarkable way, for at all the outstanding crises in the Redeemer's history—with one suggestive exception—angels are expressly represented as having been present.

Thus there was evidently an immense stir among them on the occasion of the incarnation. One of their number, Gabriel, came expressly from heaven to announce to the Virgin the approaching conception and birth; and on that memorable Christmas night, when the Son of the Highest actually appeared among men, the upper sanctuary seemed for the time altogether to lose its attractions, its wonted inhabitants

leaving behind them its shining courts, and, like crowds collecting to see some extraordinary spectacle, hastening down to feast their eyes on the new wonder of "God manifest in the flesh." Nor did the interest of the angels in the infant Saviour cease with His advent. Scarcely had He begun to tabernacle among men, when He encountered the enmity which it had been prophesied He would have to face. Herod sought to slay him. But there were heavenly guardians on the watch. By one of them, those who stood to him in the relation of parents, were warned to flee with their charge to Egypt, which they did. As it was not meet, however, that the residence of the Messiah should be unduly prolonged in a heathen land, another angel came by and by with the intelligence that the threatened danger was past, and the holy family returned to their own country.

The next great turning-point in our Lord's history was reached when the time came for His entering on His public ministry ; and here, too, we meet the angels. The occasion was signalled by two events—His temptation and His baptism. No mention is made of the presence of any member of the heavenly host at the latter ceremonial, for what Toplady gives as a very excellent reason, because, says he, "personages of dignity infinitely superior to that of angels constituted and crowned the grandeur of the scene." But there was no cause why they should have been overlooked if they were within

sight or hearing when Christ was with the wild beasts in the wilderness; and accordingly we read that when the Tempter retired from the conflict with Him, baffled and discomfited, "angels came and ministered unto Him"—the idea being plainly conveyed that they had been all the while at hand, eye-witnesses of the assault, but prevented from interfering with it, and that they eagerly pressed forward with their help and homage for the Victor when they saw that the battle had been triumphantly won.

Again, going forward in the life to that other event which stands out at the close of His ministry as the temptation does at the commencement of it—the agony in the Garden; then anew we observe the presence of the angels. Satan then sought to find a vulnerable point in Him, and put forth all his skill and strength to secure it. Nor was the onset easily resisted. For a moment he seemed to be giving way, but "*there appeared an angel from heaven* STRENGTHENING *Him,*" and the tide of battle turned. This contest did not take Him by surprise—He fully expected it; and more than that He perfectly knew what would be the final issue. "The prince of this world," He said to His disciples in anticipation of it, "cometh and findeth nothing in Me." But in His hour of trial—to use again the words of Toplady—"He was seen, He was heard, He was deplored of angels. They joined with the agonising petitioner. They united their supplications with

His, and the prayers of angels went up, for once, through the hands of a Mediator."

No beneficent spirit presented himself to minister to Christ on the succeeding day—the day on which He was crucified. We have said that there was one great crisis in the life of Christ where angels were conspicuous by their absence. This was the crisis to which we referred. But there is no mystery in the circumstance. We know well the reason why none of them appeared at the cross. It was because He was there "treading the winepress alone"—because He had been given up into the hands of wicked men to do their worst with Him—and because even the Father had for the time withdrawn Himself and hid His face from His Beloved. We can well believe that there were multitudes of the heavenly host hovering not very far off and gazing with amazement at a spectacle which must have seemed to them more wonderful than the Incarnation itself, but they were constrained to keep aloof from the scene, and the Sufferer was left to drink to the dregs the bitter cup without His being offered one word of sympathy or encouragement.

The death over, however, there remained no reason why the manifestation of feeling should be further restrained, and on the resurrection morning one notices something of the same kind of joyful stir which was observable on the evening of the advent. It was an angel who came and rolled away the stone which closed

the mouth of the sepulchre—a glorious angel, for “his countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow, and for fear of him the keepers did shake and became as dead men.” It was an angel who first announced to the world the great foundation fact on which rests the superstructure of Christian truth. “Fear not ye,” he said to the women, “for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified. He is not here, for HE IS RISEN, as He said.” And there is something intensely touching and significant in the spectacle which Mary saw, when through her blinding tears she looked into the empty tomb. For there, in the spot which was now hallowed to them by such dear associations that they could not tear themselves away from it, there were “two angels in white sitting, the one at the head and the other at the feet, *where the body of Jesus had lain.*”

Forty days longer did the Lord continue to live in the world, but at last the memorable day arrived which was to witness His return to heaven. And then, as might well have been expected, the angels who had heralded His advent appeared to manifest their equal interest in His ascension. The former was a joyful event for men, and the firmament rang accordingly with angelic congratulations. The latter, on the contrary, seemed a mournful event to those who had learnt His value, the heavenly messengers lovingly changed their tone and spoke to the about to be orphaned Church

words of cheer and hopefulness. Two men in white apparel suddenly presented themselves to the bereaved and bewildered disciples and said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven."

So—at the birth of Christ—and at His temptation—in the garden on the occasion of His agony—and alike at the resurrection and ascension, we meet directly representatives of the principalities and powers in heavenly places. From the lips of an angel came the first certain announcement of the advent of the Messiah; and angels, too, were the first who after His return to glory proclaimed to a despairing world the promise of His second coming. These facts are more than enough to prove how profound was the interest taken by those higher intelligences in the person and work of Christ.

But now let us see what place the angels occupied in the teaching of Christ. And, first of all, we may notice the testimony he bore to the elevation of their character and to the dignity of their position in the unseen world. He spoke, for instance, of the spirituality of their nature when He told the Pharisees that the redeemed after the resurrection will be "as the angels of God in heaven." Their extraordinary intelligence, too, is implied in the declaration that of the day and hour of the final judgment "knoweth no man—no, not the angels

which are in heaven." Then what a revelation is made to us of their unselfishness and generosity when more than once we read that "there is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth." And it is impossible not to be struck by the significance of the fact that the Judge of all will have an eye to them in the recognition of the redeemed. "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him shall the Son of Man also confess *before the angels of God.*" The angels, in fact, may be regarded as the nobility of the kingdom which is above; and considering that in their moral, spiritual, and mental qualities they bear so conspicuously the image of the King, they may be emphatically spoken of as worthy of their position.

Jesus, however, in His teaching does not confine Himself to describing in a general way the dignity of the angels. He tells us also something about their occupations. For example, He has indicated the character of the relation sustained by them to men in the intermediate state between death and judgment. In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the beggar is represented as having been carried by angels into Abraham's bosom—from which we may infer that the ministry of angels is employed in conveying the disembodied spirits of the righteous to the place where they are kept till they are received up into glory—a conclusion which is confirmed by what Christ said with regard to His own second coming. When

the time for that event appears, "He will send His angels, and shall gather together His elect from the four winds; from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven." But this will not be all. The angels will be the instruments of His vengeance as well as the ministers of His grace. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind, which when it was full, they drew to shore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels and cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world. The angels shall come forth and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire, there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." No wonder that those beneficent beings rejoice when they hear of sinners repenting, for then there will be so many the fewer to banish from the sight of God.

These references apply chiefly to work which the angels will have to do in the future. But it is not less interesting to read of the nature of their ministry in the present life. We have seen what they were to Christ Himself, and we may call to mind how much more they would have been to Him if He had chosen to employ them in His service. "Thinkest thou not," He said, when an attempt was made to rescue Him from danger by human means—"thinkest thou not that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He shall presently give Me more than twelve legions of angels?" But they did not wait only

on the Master. They are equally zealous in their care for His redeemed. "Are they not all ministering spirits sent to minister to them which shall be heirs of salvation?" Nor is it only the great and noble whom they watch over. On the contrary, it would seem that those who from their youth or ignorance or helplessness or inexperience are least esteemed among men, are so jealously guarded by them that it is highly perilous for any one to treat them with indifference or contempt. "Take heed" is one of our Lord's most remarkable utterances—"take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones, for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven." The little ones—meaning by that babes in Christ, young pilgrims, as well as little children—would thus seem to have in heaven their guardian angels. These angels have much in their power because of their essential qualities of intelligence and strength. But they possess a special privilege which must ever give to their protection a distinctive and extraordinary value—namely, that they have such ready access to God—"they always behold His face."

What a comfort there is in this thought! We know that the devil as a roaring lion goeth about seeking whom he may devour—that around us are spirits of evil who are ceaselessly striving to achieve our ruin; and in view of these facts we might well despair of being able to conquer in the fight with sin. But it is not

we alone who wage this battle. There are principalities and powers in heavenly places who are personally interested in our success, and no greater assurance could possibly be given to us of final victory than this, that those who are on our side are in immediate contact with Him who is omniscient and omnipotent.

It seems strange, when we first think of it, that there should have been no record of any conflict between the Prince of Light and the powers of darkness until the time of the temptation—when the Redeemer had been already in the world for thirty years. Satan, one would think, could scarcely have failed to notice the commotion that was created in heaven and earth by the birth at Bethlehem, and it is likely enough that the massacre of the innocents took place at his instigation. But there is reason to believe that he did not, to begin with, apprehend the gravity of the crisis which had arisen. He does not seem to have realised that the Child born was the only begotten Son of God. "With a Socinian creed," says the author of "*Ecce Deus*," "the devil adopted a Socinian policy in the wilderness. He assailed *the man*. He aimed no weapon at *the God*." In this way he took no more than ordinary precautions to protect the interests of his kingdom. What he might have done had the life of Jesus at Nazareth been, as the Papists paint it, full of

prodigies and wonders, is another question. But happily, in conformity with that wise system of arrangement which we see in every part of the gospel history, the opening period of his career was free from everything that was fitted to startle the outlying world, and the Evil One, among others, appears to have been thrown off his guard.

The time came, however, when the true character of the mission of Christ could not be hid, and then we read, not only how the prince of the devils—not lacking audacity, whatever else he wanted—met the new messenger from heaven and engaged Him in single combat, but how thereafter the life of that messenger came to be at every step a hand-to-hand conflict with all the principalities and powers of evil.

In the Gospels that conflict is described under three aspects. First, we have an account of two extraordinary *personal encounters* between the Friend of Sinners and His great adversary. Second, we read of a sharp war of aggression which was carried on against the demons by whom so many of the children of Abraham were possessed. And third, we have indications of the commencement of that greater campaign which is still proceeding, and which will end in the establishment of a Divine spiritual ascendancy over Satan, and in the overthrow of that dominion which since the Fall he has exercised over the souls of men.

To the two personal encounters we have

already had occasion to allude. The one took place when Christ was about to begin His public ministry, the other when His ministry was about to close. He entered on the first in a wilderness, after having fasted for forty days ; He entered on the second in a garden, and just after He had partaken of the Passover supper with His disciples. In the earlier conflict the Tempter appealed to His wants, to His hunger, to His desire for some sign or token of His Father's care, to His ambition ; in that which came later, Satan tried to work upon His fears, conjuring up before His imagination the awfulness of the death He was about to die, and endeavouring to make Him think about His own individual interests while leaving the doomed world to its fate. Nor were the weapons used in the defence the same. In the one He chiefly used the sword of the Word, in the other He sought relief in prayer. But in both of the encounters He was equally successful. The prince of this world came, and, finding nothing in Him, retired discomfited, and the Victor came out of the battle in each case not enfeebled, but invigorated. Especially was that the case when His conflict in Gethsemane was over. His "soul trouble" then came to an end—the tumult of emotion, which seemed for a time to threaten to overwhelm Him, subsided—and He was able to face the ordeal before Him, the shame and the suffering, with a serenity which nothing could

disturb, and at the same time with a majesty by which His enemies were overawed.

As to the demons, Christ carried the war into the enemy's country. He had not long begun His work when these creatures were made aware of the presence of a power in the world more potent than their master's. The first recorded miracle in this connection was performed in the synagogue at Capernaum, but it is doubtful whether that was the earliest blow struck in this way at the kingdom of Satan, because by that time the devils knew Him, and knew Him as a mighty enemy to be feared. "What have we to do with Thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth?" was their cry, "Art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God." It was from the mouth of the man possessed that this cry came—and what a fearful thing it must have been to hear it in a place of worship! It was the howl of a demon, disturbed in its dreadful work of degrading and demoralizing a human being (for the man had "an unclean spirit") and which was demanding that it should be "let alone." We read of men whose flesh crept, and whose blood ran cold, when there arose in certain Presbyterian Churches the unearthly "utterances" of some who claimed to speak with tongues. But far more frightful than those must have been the clamour in the Capernaum synagogue. Christ, however, retained through all the commotion His composure and dignity. He answered the

challenge of the demon. He refused to "let him alone." He insisted that He "had to do" with such as he was. The enslaving of a son of Abraham was what He, who had come on a mission of mercy to the children of Abraham, could not consent to countenance. And accordingly this is what we read: "He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying, Hold thy peace and come out of him. And when [the demon] had torn the man [doing in departure as much damage as he dares], and cried with a loud voice [reminding those who heard him of the angry roar of a wild beast compelled by force to let go his prey] he came out of him. And they were all amazed among themselves, saying, What thing is this? What new doctrine is this? *For with authority commanded He even the unclean spirits and they obey Him.*"

In such a way as this—that is, in the manner of a conqueror possessing powers that were irresistible—He passed through all the land. Once and again, as in Capernaum, in the country of the Gadarenes, under the very shadow of the Mount of Transfiguration, in the far north on the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and on the east of Jordan in the region of Perea, He gained victories over the Evil One so signal that they were reckoned worthy of specific mention in the history. But these were merely outstanding examples of His successes; and with regard to His general experience we have this testimony, showing what was everywhere

taking place, "Unclean spirits, when they saw Him, fell down before Him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God."

How beneficent was this work of Christ appears in the most impressive way when we look at the miserable condition in which those were whom the demons possessed, and at the change which they underwent when the word of power had been spoken over them! What a frightful picture, for instance, is presented to us in the story of the naked demoniac whom the Redeemer met one morning when He landed on the coast of Gadara. The man was then fresh from the tombs amid which and in the neighbouring mountains he spent his days, crying and cutting himself with stones. The country people, terrified by his wildness, had often tried to cure or at least to restrain him. But their efforts had been in vain, for the strength of a legion of devils possessed him, and he had the free and unrestricted range of the whole district—a savage and intractable madman. That the evil spirits who had had the control of such a man should have been found ready at once to acknowledge the authority of Jesus Christ was in itself a striking testimony to His greatness, but that He was able, with a word, to cast them out was a startling proof of His supernatural power. But the incident is notable chiefly because it brings out into vivid relief the blessedness of the effects which followed from Christ's interference. Two pictures, as it were, hang upon it. One we

have already looked at. And here is the other:—

“They came to Jesus and saw him that was possessed with the devil and had the legion, sitting, and clothed and in his right mind. And when He [Jesus] was come to the ship, he that had been possessed with the devils prayed Him that he might be with Him. Howbeit Jesus suffered him not, but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee and hath had compassion on thee. And he departed, and began to publish in Decapolis how great things Jesus had done for him, and all men did marvel.” The fierce, untamable demoniac had become a peaceful preacher of the gospel.

By and by, as we remember, the Pharisees tried to account for the marvellous power which Jesus exercised over the demons. He was in league, they argued, with Beelzebub, the chief of the devils. This was a contention similar to that which unbelievers have sometimes employed to explain the early success of Christianity. The apostles and others, according to the view taken by them, were simply designing men who were moved by personal ambition. They wanted to be famous, and so they constructed some cunningly devised fables, and called the collection a Divine volume—the Book of God. But what an extraordinary way that was of gaining their ends! These wicked and self-seeking men entered into a conspiracy

to write an undeniably good book, and to frame a system whose whole tendency is to purify and elevate! The means and the end are so marvellously unlike that it is difficult to understand how any sane person can believe that they were intentionally connected. But such a theory is not more absurd than that by which the Pharisees sought to account for the acts of Christ. To send unclean spirits into the abyss—to deliver men forcibly from their dominion—to introduce light and peace and hope, where before were darkness and madness and despair, was plainly to encroach upon the kingdom of Satan, and to suppose that He worked in the devil's names and by the devil's authority is to assume that the Evil One had begun to fight against himself. The idea, however, was more than stupid. It was profane. And there are no occasions on which the meek spirit of the Redeemer exhibited more emphatically marks of provocation than those on which His name was then associated with that Beelzebub. It was then that He warned His hearers against the awful and unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost.

But there remains to be noticed one other aspect of the great conflict between Christ and the spirits of evil—that which shows Him engaged in the overthrow of Satan's spiritual ascendancy in the world. It was eminently this sovereignty which the Divine Redeemer came among us to put an end to, and what steps He took to accomplish that end is patent

to all who read His history. By His personal example He showed to men what kind of life theirs behoved to be—by His teaching He brought down fresh light from heaven and sought to disperse the darkness which had settled down so fatally on the human mind—and by His atoning death He purchased for us the gift of the Holy Ghost and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

Satan was not long in observing the danger to which these operations exposed his dominion, and failing to overcome the great leader of the crusade in single combat, and failing also to oppose a successful resistance to the power which was driving his emissaries into the abyss, he fell back upon those “devices” by means of which he had succeeded in corrupting man at the first, and by the use of which he still hoped to retain his supremacy over him.

Of these devices we hear again and again. The Jews fancied they were doing God service by trying to put a period to the ministry of Christ; but they were mistaken. Their enmity derived its inspiration from a lower source. Peter dreamt he was doing a service to his Master when he took Him aside and remonstrated with Him on His determination to go forward to the cross, but we know it was Satan who was the real author of the suggestion—and as for Judas, although he had no thought but about his own interest when he offered to betray the Just One, he was really acting under the influence of the

Evil One. "Ye are of your father, the devil," said Jesus to the Pharisees, "and the lusts of your father ye will do." "Get thee behind me, Satan," were the stern words which were addressed to Peter, "for thou savourest not the things that be of God but the things that be of men." "Have not I chosen you twelve?" said Christ to His disciples and Judas, "and one of you is a devil."

The audacity of Satan in waging this warfare is indeed appalling. He was not afraid to enter Eden and to deface the fair creation which had just come fresh from its Maker's hands. He was not afraid to venture into the wilderness and endeavour to shake the loyalty of the Messiah Himself. And not content with using as his tools the hypocritical formalists who ruled the Jewish Church, he broke into the inner circle of Christ's disciples, and laid his hand on the boldest, the most prominent, and in some respects the truest of them all. Nor, possibly, would he have failed in this assault if on Peter's behalf there had not taken place an act of marked Divine interposition. "Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not."

It was truly a tremendous conflict of which we get these glimpses, but happily there was never any cause for fear as to what was to be the issue. Once, when the Seventy returned from their mission and brought good tidings of their

success, Jesus, seeing in their report a sign and promise of the coming downfall of the reign of evil, said exultingly, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven." Later on, when He was brought immediately face to face with His own death, and saw in prophetic vision what were to be its consequences, He broke out again in words of triumph, "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." While on yet another occasion, when looking into the still further future and forecasting what He knew would be at the end of all things, He spoke of a fire which was "prepared for the devil and his angels."

CHAPTER III

THE OUTLYING RACES

JESUS CHRIST was by birth a Jew, and He spent the whole of His active life in His own country. But in prophecy He was pointed to as "the Desire of all nations," and once and again He was brought into contact with representatives from among the Gentiles in ways which plainly suggested that He had a message for the world.

The first from among the outlying races who manifested a special interest in Him were the Wise Men from the East. These men were more than astronomers; they were astrologers—that is, they believed that the heavenly bodies are not only regulated by discoverable laws, but that a mysterious connection subsists between them and the destinies of men in the world. Pursuing their observations under the influence of this conviction, they were led to take note of a remarkable constellation which suggested to them that an event had occurred or was about to

occur which was of universal interest and importance.

How they could possibly have been conducted to that conclusion by such light alone as their science afforded, is a question. But it is not unlikely that they were helped to reach it by the condition of things around them. For it is known that all over the East at this time there existed a dumb longing for some supernatural intervention. The Jews, who were scattered abroad, gave shape to that aspiration by declaring that it was to be fulfilled in their own land; and further, there is nothing essentially incredible in the suggestion that the prophecy of Balaam had penetrated beyond the country in which it was first uttered, and had laid hold on the imaginations of some of the disciples of Zoroaster. Anything said about a star was, we may be sure, certain to arrest the attention of habitual stargazers, and it is not impossible that the original cause of the Magi's visit to Jerusalem is to be sought in these words: "I shall see Him, but not now; I shall behold Him, but not nigh; there shall come A STAR out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel. . . . Out of Jacob shall He come that shall have dominion." This, spoken in the hearing of a heathen nation, was a distinct prediction of the coming of a Jewish King—of a King whose appearance was to be like the flashing forth on the world of a new star; and supposing the Wise Men to have been not mere dreamers, but in their own way

earnest truth-seekers, it is not unreasonable to suppose that they were led to connect that saying, when they knew of it, with the notable luminous phenomenon which happened to come under their observation in the sky.

What "the star" was nobody can say for certain. It may have been a comet or a meteor; it may have been a sun placed at such an immense distance from the earth that only then did its light first reach a human eye; or it may have been, as Kepler thought, a brilliant constellation formed by the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn. Whatever it was, the attention of the Wise Men was irresistibly attracted to it. Its aspect was so extraordinary that they came without hesitation to the conclusion that it portended some extraordinary event; and whether through Balaam's prophecy or otherwise, they were led further to think that the event had occurred or was about to occur in Judea.

It is conceivable, however, that the Magi might have come to these conclusions without their leading to any practical consequences. They were characteristically men of science, and as such they might have contented themselves merely with the publication of their hypotheses. But they had, it would seem, something of the unsophisticated seriousness of the shepherds. They were anxious, for themselves, to "see" the thing which was about to come to pass, and, not satisfied with watching the star

and waiting to hear what it turned out to mean, they left their homes, and, after, it may be, months of travel, they were enabled to offer their personal homage at the cradle of the new-born King.

The Papists say that the Wise Men were themselves kings, and they even go so far as to claim to know their names and where they were buried. Europe, it appears, holds their ashes. "Melchior," "Balthasar," and "Caspar" rest at Cologne. It does not need to be said that there is not much proof in confirmation of that story. But one thing we may assume about the men, viz., that they were rich. For large means must have been needed to bear the cost of the long journey they undertook, and yet, when they arrived at Bethlehem, it was made plain that the expenditure had not impoverished them, for they were then still in a condition to make gifts to the Child of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

We can scarcely place the time of this remarkable visit earlier than after the presentation in the temple. Those pictures, therefore, must be pronounced to be fanciful which show the Magi and the shepherds coming into the stable together and worshipping the Infant in the manger, with oxen and asses occupying the neighbouring stalls. When they arrived in Bethlehem the excitement about the taxing must have been over—the town must have returned to its usual state—and Joseph and Mary must have been living in some dwelling-house more suited to their wants

than the one in which the birth had taken place. But it is likely enough that their resting-place was still a poor enough habitation, and the contrast must have been sufficiently striking between the outward poverty of the inmates and the extraordinary conduct of those wealthy and dignified and far-travelled strangers.

But to us the scene is specially noteworthy, because here appeared the first link of association between the heathen nations and the world's Redeemer. Arabia and Persia were seen stretching out their hands unto God. And the fact was made known and illustrated that He who was born King of the Jews was to be a Light to the Gentiles as well as the glory of His people Israel.

It is interesting to remember that we have a companion picture to this presented at the close of our Lord's life. On the last day—or the last but one—of His public ministry before He suffered, while He was preaching in the temple, certain GREEKS are said to have come to Philip asking that they might be introduced to his Master. It is agreed on all hands that those were not mere Hellenistic Jews or natives of Greece who had become, through circumcision, full members of the Jewish Church, but that they were representatives of some purely Gentile community who, having become believers in Jehovah, had come up to His chosen seat to do honour to Him in the temple where He had recorded His name. In all probability they had never

heard of Jesus until they arrived in the land of Israel. Whatever His fame was within the limits of His own country, it had, we may be sure, not yet reverberated beyond it. They could not, however, be long in Jerusalem without hearing mention made of Him, and being evidently earnest men, seeking truth wherever it could be found, it was not at all strange that, being unencumbered with Hebrew prejudices, they should have felt their interest powerfully excited by the rumours that reached them of Christ's character and works. They resolved, therefore, to seek an interview with Him. But as He was a Jewish teacher they did not venture to address Him directly, but sought the intervention of one of His disciples. It is significant that Philip, whom they approached, did not see his way to act alone in the matter. He insisted on taking along with him his fellow-disciple Andrew, and the two together informed their Master that certain Greeks were waiting outside, desiring to speak with Him. The emotion manifested by the Lord on the intimation being conveyed to Him was extraordinary. He regarded it as a sign—a sign that the end was near. “Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified!” That is to say, He looked on the request of the Greeks as indicating the impatient knocking at the door of the Gospel Church of the expectant Gentile and outlying world.

The three years' ministry of Christ were for the Jewish nation like the three years' grace which was allowed to the barren fig-tree. When these years were running, it might be said to have remained uncertain whether the world was to be blessed through that nation, or whether its walls were to be broken down and the vineyard be made a common. Already enough had taken place to show that the latter alternative was the likeliest to occur; and outside the hosts were collecting which were to rush in and overspread the good land. Still, however, the actual crisis had not arrived. The Messiah was still pleading with the hitherto favoured race within the precincts of their own unfallen temple, and who could tell what might be the effect of this appeal even at the eleventh hour? But of a sudden a party of men, with foreign faces and in strange attire, are to be seen forcing their way inward through the Jewish crowd! Who are they? They are Wise Men from the West—representatives of Greek culture, as the Magi were representatives of Oriental lore; and so eager are they to get access to the Hebrew teacher that they interrupt Him even in the midst of a public discourse. What does this mean? It means that the doom of the dispensation is being pronounced. These strangers are unconsciously pleading for the outlying world. They ask, in effect, that Judaism shall be abandoned to its fate and that the wants of the Gentiles be more formally recognised. And their pleading

was not in vain. The sign was acknowledged. The Messiah hailed the incident as proclaiming that "the hour" had come; and what had been prophesied and promised at the birth of Jesus—goodwill to all men—was sealed and confirmed in the Sacrifice on the cross.

It is worth noting in this connection that Jesus Christ Himself was at one time a resident in a Gentile country. How long He remained in Egypt is uncertain. One, two, three, and even seven years have all been named. But it does not seem likely that He was longer there than a few months. Egypt was then, like so many of the other countries of the world, a part of the Roman Empire, so that it would be absurd to picture His position in that land as resembling that of Joseph or Moses under the Pharaohs. Besides, there had already settled in the valley of the Nile large colonies of Jews; and we may assume that Mary with her Infant charge sought a refuge among them rather than in any ordinary Egyptian village. Still, the fact remains that the Son of God Incarnate breathed for a time the air of another country than that of Israel; and just as it is customary to say of Abraham that, when he had purchased a burying-place in Canaan, he secured a foothold in his inheritance, so we may allow ourselves to think of this passing visit of Christ—this brief break in the monotony of an otherwise exclusively Jewish life—as typical of the interest which He had in the regions beyond and of the

conquests which in course of time He was to make from among the Gentiles. In this view, there may be more than a mere historical fact indicated in the saying, "Out of Egypt have I called My Son." It may point to the part which we have in the world-history of the Redeemer. There was Gentile blood in His veins ; Gentiles as well as Jews welcomed Him at His appearance in the world ; and if we would follow Him step by step throughout His whole career, we must, at one point at least, go beyond the bounds of the Holy Land and enter the great waste field of the outlying races.

After all, however, our Lord did not need to go beyond the limits of Israel, or to have visits paid to Him from abroad, in order to come into contact with representatives of the Gentile world. In the first place, just as in a Canadian clearing there are often to be seen, side by side with the last results of modern cultivation, traces of primeval forests—so in Judea, after centuries of change, there still lingered some descendants of the aboriginal inhabitants, and with at least one of these Jesus had direct personal intercourse. Then, in the very heart of the country, there was established a whole colony of strangers with whom the pure Hebrew would have no dealings—the Samaritans—descendants of those heathen emigrants whom the Assyrian and Babylonian kings had brought from the East to occupy the fields made vacant by the captivities of Israel. With these aliens Christ frequently

met, and we have a great deal of information as to the light in which He regarded them. Finally, Palestine was at this time under the rule of the Romans, and it would have been no more possible for any one to live in the country without encountering now and again some of them than it would be for a traveller at the present day to pass through India without once meeting an Englishman.

There are few more striking stories in the Gospels than that of the Syro-Phœnician woman. She was of the aboriginal Canaanitish race, but she had been led to believe in the power and grace of Christ, and under circumstances of great distress she came to Him to seek His help. At first she met with what looked like a very cold reception. He paid no apparent heed to her application, although in her anguish she "cried" after Him. The disciples, surprised at His behaviour, begged that if He did not mean to do anything for the woman He would at least send her away. But He turned a deaf ear to their intercession. Answering them that "He was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," He continued on His way without vouchsafing a word either of comfort or of explanation to the suppliant. But still this Gentile mother persisted in her appeal. She would have from the Lord an answer of some kind, and at last she got it. "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs." No reply could

well appear to be more discouraging. But even out of these words the despairing ingenuity of the woman extracted ground for hope. Accepting the position assigned her—that of a dog—she pleads for treatment at least as such. “Truth, Lord ; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the Master’s table.” The argument was unanswerable. As Trench puts it, “She entangled Him in His talk.” And with an admiring exclamation of “O woman, great is thy faith !” He consented to be overcome and gave her all that she had asked.

As illustrating the Catholic bearings of Christ’s ministry the incident is most instructive. He tells what was the special work He had been commissioned to do. He had come to provide food for the children, and He was not expressly sent to any who were outside the house of Israel. But that did not mean either that God had no purpose of grace in regard to other than the Hebrew family or that He Himself was absolutely tied down to bestow His benefits only and exclusively upon it. He came to the Jew *first*—the strength of His own personal ministry was to be given to him—but he was not to end there, nor was He limited in the dispensation of His mercy even by the old doom which consigned the Canaanites to extermination. Like a full fountain, His infinite compassion was ever tending to flow over the banks which had been placed to confine it—and in the pity shown to the Syro-Phœnician woman, in contravention as

it seemed of the theory of His commission, there was a foreshadowing of that universal beneficence which was shortly to appear in the proclamation of the gospel.

His attitude toward the Samaritans was even more suggestive. He did, indeed, expressly notice their outcast state, for in sending out the twelve to do evangelistic work He said to them, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not, but go rather unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." But the spirit of His life and teaching is not only not unfriendly to this race, but very much the contrary. One reason of that may have been that since they acknowledged the Pentateuch it was unjust to speak of them as if they were heathen, and that the intense dislike of the Jews to them was, in His view, quite unwarranted by their circumstances. In any case this is plain—that the Samaritans were regarded by Him with a kindly interest.

One instance of that appears in the parable which tells of a traveller who, in going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell among thieves. The person who is there represented as relieving the wounded man and performing a neighbour's part to him was not the priest who happened to see him first, nor the Levite who followed, nor, indeed, a Jew at all, but a despised and generous Samaritan. Then why is it but to give a pleasant idea of this race, that mention is made of ten lepers who were cleansed—only one of

whom returned to give thanks, and he a Samaritan? But a still more striking proof of Christ's interest in this people is furnished in the story of His conversation with the woman at Jacob's Well and of His subsequent stay of two days in the town of Sychar. On that occasion He made no reserve in the full and free proclamation of the gospel. To the woman He spoke of no bar as existing to her immediate enjoyment of the great evangelical blessing of the Holy Ghost. "If," He said, "thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee 'Give Me to drink,' thou wouldst have asked of Him, and *He would have given thee* living water." And although His public ministry had been carried on only for a very short time, and much remained to be done before the framework of the Jewish Church was to be broken down and the way into the holiest opened to the world, He spake as if the hour of free and universal worship had already arrived. "The hour cometh," said He, "and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth." The narrow limits of the gospel narrative did not permit of a minute Church history of the period, and when Christ left Sychar after His two days' visit we lose sight of that town altogether; but this is what we are warranted to say, that from the date of that visit there came to be established there a company of believers, and that there a Christian Gentile congregation was formed under the personal ministry of the Messiah.

Another thing to be remembered is that as Jesus Christ traversed the country He could not help coming into occasional contact with representatives of the ruling power—the Romans. Palestine was in their hands, just as India is now in ours—and, like ourselves, they had civilians collecting the taxes and soldiers occupying cantonments wherever these seemed to be necessary. There was, indeed, a radical difference between the two systems. The “collectors” in our Indian Civil Service are, generally speaking, Europeans, and men of high social standing. Their salaries are paid by the Government, and to protect them against the temptation to be partial in their judgments, they are forbidden to accept any presents from the natives. In Judea, on the other hand, the ungracious task of gathering in the revenue was entrusted to Jewish citizens who engaged to pay a fixed sum into the treasury, and who, in order to make up that sum and something over, were often constrained to wring money out of the people by false accusations. These farmers of the taxes naturally lost caste when they undertook this unpatriotic business. They were regarded at once as base men who were ready to do any work, however vile, for gold, and as traitors who had sold themselves to the enemy. Hence, though they were by birth the children of Abraham, they were thought of as aliens and apostates, and treated accordingly, and it is not a little significant that Christ laid so little stress

on their unfaithfulness and preached the gospel as freely to them as to others—even admitting one of them into the inner circle of His disciples.

The military, however, much more thoroughly represented a foreign element in Judea. The army of occupation is said to have consisted of six cohorts, each containing one thousand men. Five of these were stationed at Cæsarea, and one at Jerusalem, companies from them being posted, as at Capernaum, in all the provincial towns where a police force seemed to be required. With members of this Roman army Jesus Christ could not help meeting now and then. His opportunities for doing so were, probably, not very many. The Jews of the time enjoyed a great deal of practical liberty. Their conquerors well knew that their yoke was submitted to with impatience, and they were careful to avoid awakening the popular animosity by needlessly parading the symbols of authority. Hence it is probable that the Roman uniform was not very often to be seen in the midst of crowds which collected to hear the preaching of the Messiah. Still they could not altogether be kept out of sight, and several instances are given of Christ and the military classes being brought together.

For example, there was at this time stationed at Capernaum a Roman officer of whom a most attractive account is given. He was a centurion, or captain, in rank, and he was probably the commandant of the detachment which garrisoned

the town. By birth he was a Gentile, and we may assume a heathen, but during his residence in Palestine he had made himself acquainted with the religion of the Jews and had become so entirely persuaded of its truth that he had built a synagogue for the people at his own expense. This act had gained for him the respect and confidence of the inhabitants, and when some serious malady had laid low a favourite servant of his he easily persuaded the elders of the Church to intercede with Christ on his behalf. In all likelihood Jesus Himself was no stranger to the high reputation of the man, and when He was asked therefore to do him a kindness He at once indicated His willingness to comply. But the graciousness of the response brought out into relief an extraordinary feature in the character of the centurion. It was found that he not only knew in a general way something about the Redeemer, but had formed a most exalted notion of His dignity and greatness. He declared himself unworthy to receive a personal visit from Him, he protested against His putting Himself to the trouble of undertaking any journey on his account, and, in the fulness of a faith which knew no limitations, he prayed that the Lord would only speak the healing word where He then stood. This sublime confidence in His power called forth from Christ some words of strong admiration—words similar to those which He had used in His interview with the Syro-Phœnician woman—and,

indeed, it is very specially worthy of notice that the two persons whose faith is most emphatically commended in the Gospels were not Jews but Gentiles.

But it is not everywhere that the Roman soldier shows so favourably. It is true that at a later date another centurion uttered words which said something for the speaker, and which have been reckoned important enough to be preserved in the evangelical record. We refer to the centurion who had military charge of the crucifixion. He could not resist the force of the evidence which presented itself in favour of the Divinity of the Sufferer, and cried out, under the pressure of overpowering emotion, "Truly this was the Son of God." But of the rank and file of the Roman army nothing is told but what suggests the idea of callousness and brutality. With what heartless zest, for example, did both Herod's and Pilate's bodyguards set about the business of mocking and torturing the Just One. No pity or feeling of remorse seems to have possessed them as they applied the cruel scourge to His back, or clothed Him with contempt in a royal robe, or plaited a crown of thorns and forced it on His bleeding brow, or when with derisive laughter they bowed the knee before Him and pretended to do homage to Him as a King. Nor do they appear different at the cross. With rude hands they bind their victim to the tree and drive the nails into His shrinking flesh ; and, then, in cool indifference to His

agony, they sit down to chaffer with one another over the disposal of His clothes. And this brutal hardness of nature continued to the last. Others were awed by the darkness and the earthquake and the voices, but they seem to have remained unaffected, and we see them still acting in character when, going round the crosses, they roughly broke the limbs of the thieves, and drove a spear into the heart of Christ.

About the crucifixion, we are accustomed to think of the crime as lying exclusively at the door of the Jewish race ; but that is a mistake. Representatives of all the three continents into which the ancient world was divided gathered around the cross of Christ. First there was Asia, represented by the Jews ; second there was Europe, represented by the Romans ; and third there was Africa, represented by, among others, the man who happened to arrive in Jerusalem as the mournful procession was moving out to Calvary, and whom the lawless soldiers pressed into their service. This man—Simeon—was from Cyrene, a province in the north of Africa, near the Mediterranean, and as he is said elsewhere to have been called Niger, there is nothing unreasonable in supposing him to have been a negro. In any case he was an African, and although the work he did was on compulsion, happier far was his lot than that of those who tyrannised over him. He was permitted, Gentile as he was, to afford some relief to the weary

Saviour. This providential encounter led, there is some ground for thinking, at once to his own conversion and to that of his sons—and if he did become a believer, what a perennial spring of thankfulness there would be to him in the thought that on the awful day of the crucifixion he was not with the mocking multitude, but by the side of the Master, helping Him to bear His cross! On that occasion, then, Africa was well represented. She, at least, had no part in the crime that was then committed. The guilt lay chiefly at the door of Asia. The Jews conceived the idea of the outrage—they persistently and remorselessly schemed for it—and it was by their unreasoning violence that it was at last consummated. It is the fact, then, that as they wished it to be, the blood of Christ is specially “on them and their children.” But the hands of Europe are not clean. One European—Pontius Pilate—could have prevented the catastrophe if he had dared to act up to his convictions, while his men of war—Europeans also—were the active instruments in carrying the decree which he was moved to issue into execution. We can find some excuse for the Jews, in the blinding influence of their fanaticism; but for the governor hardly any excuse can be found. Not only was he persuaded that Christ had committed no capital offence, but he was at pains to proclaim his absolute innocence, and he took every step, short of a peremptory veto on the proceedings,

to secure his discharge. He was afraid, however, to oppose the popular clamour, and the very judge, who, to make known his position, washed his hands of all complicity in the crime, passed upon Him the sentence that was demanded, and saw Him, without further remonstrance, led away to be crucified.

Of course, to get at the deepest roots of this outrage, we must go beyond all questions of nationality or race. Jesus Christ was nailed to the tree by the sin of the world, and each individual of us may, in view of that, say, "I had some hand in it." But happily, if we all share in the guilt, we may all share likewise in the blessings which the death has purchased ; and if, as we may well suppose, there were present at the Passover some of those Parthians, and Medes, and Persians, and Egyptians, and Romans, whom we find collected at Jerusalem at the subsequent Feast of Pentecost, it is pleasant to think of these representatives of the outlying races carrying back to their respective homes the news of a new gospel which, in consequence of the sacrifice offered, was to be preached to every creature.

CHAPTER IV

HIS KINSFOLK AND FRIENDS

MUCH of the interest attaching to the biographies of great men arises from what is told of their personal associations. Who were their relatives—their friends—their acquaintances—the people with whom during their lifetime they were brought into more or less intimate contact? Such questions as these tend to bring out facts and features in their history and character which would otherwise be overlooked, and hence the importance of being able to give answers to them.

What is true of ordinary men is true also of Jesus Christ. A great deal may be learnt about Him by taking account of those with whom while here He was most closely connected.

By a happy providential arrangement we do not, as a rule, when we come into the world require to *make* all the friends we are to have. At our birth we often find ourselves possessed of friends already made—fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, or other relations more

or less remote. And this was the case with Christ. When He appeared, He came into the bosom of a family circle with which He maintained a measure of connection all His days.

Most notable among these was His MOTHER.

Tradition can tell us a great deal about her. Her father, it says, was called Joachim and her mother Anna. The former was from Nazareth, the latter from Bethlehem, and, when married, they took house together at Jerusalem, where their illustrious daughter was born. Whether this story is true or not we cannot tell. All that we know of her early life for certain is that she was living at Nazareth—a betrothed virgin—when an angel announced to her that she was to be the mother of the Messiah. No one can read the account given of what happened at the annunciation without seeing that Mary must have been one of those who were then waiting for the consolation of Israel. Never before had such a message been conveyed to mortal woman, and no stronger proof could be given of the elevation of the Virgin's character than the manner in which she received it. It was not unintelligible to her, as it would have been to one unimbued with the spirit of Old Testament prophecy and promise, and accordingly there is nothing confused or incoherent in her reply. The vision of her Son's glory does not puff her up with pride—as the possibility of her having to suffer shame for His sake does not make her shrink from the relation in which she was to

stand to Him. If her reply is specially marked by anything it is by a sweet and intelligent humility. Although the intimation made to her was of a nature far more incredible than that made of old to Sarah, she staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief. Accepting the message in all simplicity she said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to Thy word." These words are, in themselves, a revelation. They show us one who, under the training of the Spirit, had been already prepared, as meetly as it was possible for any sinful woman to be, to fill the strange and glorious place of human mother to the Son of the Highest.

There is something to be learnt about Mary from the story of her visit to Elizabeth. As that visit entailed upon her a journey of many miles, there must have been some powerful motive constraining her to undertake it; and they are probably right who ascribe it on the one hand to the incredulity with which her account of the angel's announcement was received in her family, and on the other to the strong desire which would consequently spring up to meet and converse with one who would be more ready to receive her testimony. Mary and Elizabeth were, no doubt, well acquainted with each other. They were evidently women of a kindred spirit, and it is more than probable that they had often talked together of the coming of the kingdom. Mary

rightly assumed that her cousin would not rashly ascribe her condition, in the face of her own assurances, to personal unfaithfulness, and she no doubt hoped that under the roof of such a friend she might, amid the solitudes of the Judean hills, find opportunities to prepare for the trying ordeal which was before her. Nor was she disappointed in her expectations. No sooner had she entered the house of Zachariah than Elizabeth addressed her in the language of congratulation.

"Blessed," she cried, "art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me. For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed, for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord."

If the Virgin came to the hill country of Judea with an aching and anxious heart it is easy to guess how such words must have caused her to lift up her head, and the burst of exulting praise which immediately broke from her lips is exactly what one would expect as the result of a revulsion of feeling.

"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For He hath regarded the low estate of His hand-maiden, for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is

mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation."

We get another insight into the Virgin's character at Bethlehem, immediately after the birth of her Son. The event had caused no stir in the town, but it had produced no small excitement outside, and before the night on which it had occurred had fled, a party of shepherds appeared, to tell that they had seen a vision of angels, and had heard unearthly music among the clouds. Mary, it is said, marked the sign, and while to most others the circumstance was just a nine days' wonder, she, we are told, "kept all these things, and *pondered them in her heart.*" She did not say much, this meek and quiet woman. But she overlooked nothing, and she forgot nothing. And while even her husband, perhaps, in the engrossing pursuit of his calling, allowed himself sometimes to lose sight of the origin of the Child, the more thoughtful mother continued to remember the minutest incidents connected with the advent, and often asked herself what they foreshadowed. Only such a woman could have rightly discharged the peculiar office with which she was entrusted. A mere shallow-minded woman, with little or no reflectiveness, would have grown callous and indifferent; a tattling woman, who could not exist without taking her neighbour into her confidence, might have rendered impossible the privacy of the thirty

years. It was obviously necessary that the mother of our Lord should be one who could be trusted to observe and remember, and yet be silent—and such a mother was the Virgin Mary.

The revelation made to Mary by the angel—the knowledge ever present though we know it to have been to her recollection that the Child committed to her care was of supernatural origin—did not have on her the effect of repressing the natural outflow of the maternal affections. He was to her very much what another child would have been. She expended the tenderness of her nature upon Him. She watched over His growth in wisdom and stature, as any of us would watch the progress to maturity of one of our own children. And when, in course of time, He went forth on His great mission, she no doubt exulted in His triumphs, and sympathised with Him in His distresses as naturally as any other parent would do under similar circumstances. Of all this we have two illustrations. One is suggested by the story of Christ's first visit to Jerusalem. In the search for her lost boy, Mary evidently took the lead; and when He was found in the temple, it was she and not her husband who was moved to rebuke the wanderer. "Son," she said, "why hast Thou thus dealt with us? behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing." These are just such words as any ordinary mother would have used in like circumstances. The tender title she

applies to Him—"Son"; her reproachful question, "Why hast Thou thus dealt with us?" and the account which she gives of her own and Joseph's anxiety, all speak of the existence of a familiar and affectionate relationship between them.

And with this well agrees the statement with which this particular narrative closes: "And Jesus went down with His parents and came to Nazareth, and *was subject unto them.*" No declaration could more impressively proclaim the naturalness of the relations of the Virgin and her Son. She could never, indeed, forget what she knew about Him. On the contrary, we are again told at this point that "she kept all these things in her heart." But she appears to have acted, as far as possible, as if no supernatural element was present in the case, and while she felt truly toward Him as a mother, He must have reciprocated the feeling by treating her with the respect and submission of a Son. May we not say that, considering the difficulty and delicacy of her position, it was a high testimony which was borne to her character and conduct when Christ addressed her as "MOTHER," even on the Cross?

That Mary maintained her faith in her Son during the long period of preparation was proved by her conduct at the feast in Cana of Galilee. So far as we know He had never, up to that time, done anything that was manifestly supernatural, and it is one thing to believe that a person is

able to work miracles after he has been actually seen to perform them, and quite another to believe in the possession of such power before it has been displayed. But Mary had the latter kind of confidence. When they wanted wine she instinctively turned to Him, and although her interference was for the moment condemned, she persisted in the assurance that He could help at the right time, and commanded the servants to be careful to do whatever He directed.

In view of all that has been noticed, we may confidently say that the personal character of Mary, so far as it has been revealed, appears to have been in wonderful harmony with her position. There is not much incident in her story as it is given in Scripture, but enough is said to awaken our respect. But, unhappily, the perversity of superstition has demanded more than respect from us, and it is necessary to remember that she is not described in the Gospels as having been immaculate. Not very much is there said about her. Not only is far less recorded of her than of numberless other persons, but what is recorded seems as if it had been written for the express purpose of discountenancing the extravagant homage which so many insist on offering to her.

No evidence is given anywhere of her having had special influence with her Son, or of her having had assigned to her anything like a prominent position in the Church. On the

contrary, on the only two occasions on which she attempted to interfere with Christ in His work—viz., at the marriage feast in Cana and while He was preaching in Capernaum—she received rebuffs which could mean nothing but that she was presuming to come out of her proper place. “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” is language which a Mariolater must have a difficulty in explaining away; and the two incidents recorded which show that He attached comparatively little value to external relationships might well make any one pause who was thinking of the Virgin as an influential intercessor.

“While he yet talked to the people, behold His mother and His brethren stood without, desiring to speak with Him. But He answered and said unto him that told Him, Who is My mother? and who are My brethren? And He stretched forth His hand towards His disciples and said, Behold My mother and My brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of My Father which is in heaven, the same is My brother and sister and mother.”

Another day a woman who had been listening to Him with admiration, and thinking of the comfort which such a Son must be to His mother, lifted up her voice and cried, “Blessed is the womb that bare Thee, and the paps which Thou hast sucked.” But the words awakened in Him no such response as was expected. There was no peculiar advantage, He signified,

that was being enjoyed by His earthly mother. "Yea, rather," he said, "*blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.*"

The last glimpses we get of the Virgin are all of a pleasant kind, but they are not in the least such as give any countenance to the worship which is offered to her. They are simply consistent with our view of her as a true woman who was always faithful to the light vouchsafed to her. First she appears with her sister and Mary Magdalene standing near the cross, with the sword piercing through her heart as she witnesses the last agonies of her Son. Next we see her led weeping away by the beloved disciple to be thenceforward a member of his family. And finally we find her making one in the little company of a hundred and twenty followers of the Saviour who met in an upper chamber after the resurrection and became sharers together in the Pentecostal effusion of the Holy Ghost.

Around the mother there was a family circle, to some members of which we are expressly introduced. Elizabeth, for example, the wife of Zaccharias, was her cousin, so that John the Baptist and Jesus were blood relations. It will also be remembered that while, on the day of the crucifixion, the disciples generally were nowhere to be seen, there stood around the cross "His mother and His *mother's sister*, *Mary the wife of Cleophas*, and Mary Magdalene." And that when He returned to Nazareth, where His family history was so well known, this

question was asked about Him: "Is not His mother called Mary, and His brethren James and Joses and Simon and Judas: and *His sisters*, are they not all with us?" If we take this description literally, we must conclude that Joseph's household must have been a large one, and that Jesus must have shared the love and care of Mary with at least six other children. But that theory has been vehemently and not unnaturally disputed, and another explanation is certainly to be preferred—that Joseph and Cleophas, the husbands of the two Marys, died early; that the two widowed sisters then took up house together; that James and the others named were the children not of Joseph but of Cleophas; and that, consequently, those who are spoken of as the brothers and sisters of Christ were really only His first cousins. In any case, they altogether seem to have formed but one family circle; and when we follow in the footsteps of the Redeemer, it becomes an interesting question how they acted toward each other.

One notable fact is mentioned—that when He entered on His public ministry He did not carry with Him at first the confidence of His nearest of kin. It might have been expected that, familiar as they were with His character and life, they could not but have recognised in Him something supernatural. But all through the period of His rise to manhood His glory was hidden from them. "Neither," it is said, "did His brethren believe in Him."

By and by that unbelief gave way, and two of His "brethren"—Jude and James the Less—were admitted into the inner circle of the Twelve. But, it is to be observed, He gave to neither of them a place of greater prominence than his personal qualifications fitted him to fill. It was Peter and James the Great and John whom He made His chief friends and whom He took as His companions in the garden and on the Mount of Transfiguration. The circumstance is, in one respect, hardly worth remarking. We could not conceive of Him being guided in the placing of His disciples but by rules of the highest reason. But contrast is here suggested between His conduct and that of other founders of kingdoms. Napoleon, for instance, filled the thrones of Europe with members of his own family. Jesus, on the contrary, keeping ever in His eye the glory of the Father and the interests of redemption, allowed nothing—family claims or others—to stand in the way of the carrying out of the purposes of His mission.

It was with Christ, however, as with ordinary men, that, besides the friends who became naturally His in virtue of their birth, there was a new circle which, in course of time, came to be formed by ties of personal affection.

The first who broke ground for Him in that connection was John the Baptist. That John knew about the coming Messiah we may assume to be certain. His mother must have told him

about the annunciation and about the birth in Bethlehem. And whatever may have been his own thoughts while preparing for his work in the wilderness, it is evident that when he began to preach the baptism of repentance he fully expected that some extraordinary manifestation of the glory of God was about to take place. We do not know whether he and Jesus had actually met on the occasion, but it is plain that he knew of the presence of the Coming One in the crowd, for to the Pharisees who came to question him he said, "There standeth One among you whom ye know not, whose shoe's latchet I am unworthy to unloose;" and twice over, in the hearing of many, he pointed to Him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God."

It was the testimony thus publicly borne to Christ which made the first step in the direction of an extended circle of associates. Two men—one of whom was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, the other, no doubt, John—were impressed by the words, and sought an interview with the person of whom such a remarkable description was given. What took place at the interview we are not told, but it was a long one, and it must have been an instructive one, for the result of it was that the process then began which has proceeded indefinitely ever since, the accession of disciple after disciple to the great company of the redeemed. Andrew first found his own brother Simon and brought him to Christ. Next Jesus Himself "found" Philip.

Afterwards Philip "found" Nathanael. And so the circle went widening on, until the hitherto unknown Teacher found Himself surrounded by multitudes.

The men thus early awakened appear to have returned for a time to their ordinary occupations, for at a later date, when Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw three of their number busy with their boats and nets. But then a new and more imperative call was addressed to them to leave their secular work and to become "fishers of men," and the call was obeyed not only by Andrew, Peter, and John, but also by another—James—who was, in time, to play a great part in the business of propagating the new religion. If it is asked, Where was the other disciple that was "found" on the banks of the Jordan? we may confidently reply that we are to recognise Nathanael in Bartholomew—a good man of whom naturally we hear little in the Gospels, for, as "an Israelite, indeed, in whom there was no guile," he was not likely to assert himself or push to the front, but one who, when he died, would, we are sure, leave an honourable record behind him. Probably Bartholomew was not a fisherman, but a husbandman.

How Matthew was brought into the ranks is told in a very unobtrusive way by himself. He was a publican by profession—a well-to-do publican, as we may assume from the great farewell feast which he is said to have made

in his own house—and he was sitting in his office at the custom-house of Capernaum when Christ passed by and threw His mantle over him. If he had been a worldly wise man he would have thought twice before obeying a call so summary. Jesus had nothing to offer in the way of temporal advantage, and to become a disciple of His implied the surrender of what was notoriously a lucrative situation. But he did not hesitate for a moment to make the sacrifice. He rose at once—left all—and attached himself for life to Him who claimed to be the Messiah, and what manner of man he became as an apostle may be seen by all in the Gospel which bears his name.

About the early life of Thomas and the time and manner of his call we know absolutely nothing, but we have some information about his character and disposition. He was evidently a true-hearted disciple, one who was prepared to die, if required to do so, for his Master. But he was easily disheartened and depressed, and had an incurable incapacity for looking at things on their bright or hopeful side. Thus, when Jesus proposed to return again to Judea after the death of Lazarus, he could see no possible issue to the journey but that of the sacrifice of his Master. The thought of that did not terrify him, however. "Let us also go," said he, "that we may die with Him." Whatever danger threatened the Lord, he was prepared to share in it. But the words have in them a despondent

ring, and they so far reveal his nature. There was nothing sanguine in his temperament. Nor does his conduct in connection with the death of Christ show him in different colours. That event filled him with despair. He could not imagine that there could be a silver lining to a cloud so dark, and accordingly, when the rumour reached him of a resurrection, he listened to it with incredulity as the dream of men whose thoughts were the offspring of their wishes. No one can justify his doubts, of course, yet let us not ascribe them, as has often been the case, to another than their true cause. It is a mistake to think of him as naturally a sceptic. His difficulties give no countenance or encouragement to modern unbelief. Thomas was more akin to Cowper than to Newman. He was a genuine disciple. He could always be trusted to be true to his convictions, whatever they cost him. But he was not one whose influence was wholesome. That tendency to take gloomy views of things was fitted to awaken doubts in others, and hence in some ways his position among the Twelve cannot be thought of with very much satisfaction.

“James, the son of Alphæus, and Lebbeus whose surname was Thaddeus” have been already referred to. They were among the kinsfolk of Christ. Alphæus being equivalent to Cleophas, who was the father of the two men, and Thaddeus being convertible into Judas or *Jude*, by which last name this disciple is best

known in the Christian Church. Neither of them figure prominently in the story as told by the evangelists ; but we learn something of both from the letters which they have left behind them. With James, too, we are made specially familiar in consequence of his presiding over the first great Christian council and continuing to act as superintendent of the early work of evangelisation in Jerusalem and Judea.

In addition to those named, there remain two other disciples to be noticed. Of one—Judas Iscariot—not much is known, but much has been written. He is supposed by some to have been better educated than his fellow-disciples—to have been, in fact, a Scribe. What moved him to join the company of Christ was his belief that in Him was to be recognised the Deliverer who was destined to restore, in a temporal way, the kingdom of David, and what caused him to take the step which led to his death was his desire to precipitate the crisis which was, in his opinion, being too long delayed. He never imagined (so it has been speculated) that the Redeemer would allow Himself to be condemned and crucified, and when things turned out so differently from what he had anticipated, he committed suicide in despair. There is no solid foundation for this theory, but such as it is it has been accepted by many.

With the other disciple we are so far better acquainted. There were two Simons in the

apostolic band, viz., Simon Peter, and Simon Zelotes, or Simon the Canaanite. The names given to the latter of these are significant. If we were permitted to give to the term "the Canaanite" its commonest meaning we would be led to a somewhat startling conclusion—nothing else than this, that one of the Twelve was not a Jew at all but a representative of one of those outlying races to which the gospel was not freely preached till after the resurrection—nay, that one of the apostles actually belonged to the doomed race which Israel of old was commanded to exterminate. This however is, we fear, a hypothesis which cannot be accepted. A likelier explanation is this, that the word "Canaanite" comes from a root which suggests the idea of *zeal*, and that, in point of fact, the term which we might at first suppose to represent Simon's nationality has much the same signification as the other title by which he is designated. "Simon the Canaanite," in short, would seem to mean no more than "Simon Zelotes" or Simon the Zealot. It is, however, a circumstance of considerable interest that such a man should be found in such a company, for Simon before casting in his lot with Jesus Christ must have belonged to a Jewish sect which, in its day, was as well known as that of the Pharisees or Sadducees. The Zealots were fanatical Hebrew patriots who regarded with passionate dissatisfaction the subjection of their country to the Romans—who protested against

the payment of tribute to their conquerors as essentially unlawful—and who, with a quenchless love of liberty and a desperate contempt of death, never hesitated to resort to arms when they saw the slightest chance of their gaining anything from their enemies.

That Christ should have attracted to His person one of such a band of enthusiasts and should have moved him to seek the restoration of the kingdom to Israel, not by the sword but by the Word, was one of the most interesting facts contained in the Gospels. And it is specially worthy of notice that, under the constraining influence of the One Spirit, two such men were made to be able to work harmoniously together as Simon the Zealot and Matthew the publican. Outside of the circle, their political views and aspirations must have been wide as the Poles asunder. Within the Church their differences disappeared, because there they were led to see that the well-being of the world depended not on the overthrow of the Roman dominion, but on the establishment of a spiritual kingdom of God.

From what we know, we may safely affirm that the disciples of Christ had, to begin with, no social standing. A large proportion of them seem to have been fishermen, and the remainder were probably no higher in rank. Besides, they were no doubt justly designated as “ignorant and unlearned men.” Not one of them (unless it was Judas) possessed the scholarship of a

Scribe ; and not one could claim to have had the position of a Ruler or even the religious reputation of a Pharisee. But we are, by no means, to conclude from this, that in choosing His immediate followers from among the humble and unlettered classes, Christ acted under the constraint of necessity. He made His selection freely and deliberately as the one best fitted to serve His ends. He confounded the wisdom of the wise and vindicated His own authority by using agencies which were obviously incompetent in themselves ; and perhaps He acted as He did because He knew that in the unsophisticated men whom He called to His help—men unspoiled by the prejudices of the time—He would find instruments better fitted to do His work than if He had laid His hands on the most accomplished members of the Sanhedrim.

At the same time it must be well understood that it was by no means the mere obscurity of His disciples which commended them first to the attention of their Master. They had all evidently natural gifts and qualifications fitting them for the places they were afterwards required to fill. The impulsive and warm-hearted Peter—the loving and beloved John—the practical James—the guileless Nathanael—the methodical Matthew—the doubting Thomas : these are not mere names to us. Each represents a distinct individuality. And we can easily picture to ourselves how they looked as they

sat at the same table, and what kind of work they severally undertook when they were sent out into the world with the message of the gospel.

These disciples were the immediate members of the Redeemer's following, but there were others whom we now recognise as having been better entitled to the name of "friends" than some of them who seemed to stand nearer to Him. Of the Seventy, for example, whom He sent out, two by two, to proclaim the approach of "the Kingdom," we know very little, but we cannot doubt that Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Matthias, who were by and by to be proposed as fit to fill the vacancy in the apostleship, were of the number. While among the hundred and twenty who assembled in the upper room in Jerusalem to pray for the descent of the Spirit, it is certain that there must have been some who had remained faithful to Christ during the whole of His ministry. Conspicuous among these may surely be named the family of Bethany. Although that village was virtually in the suburbs of Jerusalem, and Jesus was notoriously regarded with suspicion by the authorities of the city, Martha was not only not afraid to receive Him into her house in an incidental way when He happened to be passing, but she deliberately welcomed Him as her guest during that memorable Passion Week when a price had been laid upon His head. While, as for Mary, there is no more touching

story told in Scripture than that which describes the manner in which she sought to show her affection to her Lord. As the house was filled with the fragrance of the ointment, so the whole world has been filled with the memory of her devotion. Censorious onlookers reproved her for her extravagance, but her conduct needed no justification. It is on record that the soul of the Redeemer Himself was refreshed by the intelligent and whole-hearted homage which was offered to Him.

Nor were Martha and Mary the only women who worshipped Him. Some others, we know, followed Him from place to place and "ministered to Him of their substance." Of this number, three are specially named: Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Chusa, and Susanna. Joanna is supposed to have been the wife of the courtier—"Herod's steward"—whose son was healed at Capernaum. Of Susanna we know nothing. But with the history of Mary Magdalene we are more familiar. She was one of the "Three Marys" who heard the cry of "It is finished!" She even continued to linger near the cross after all was over. When the body was taken down and placed in the tomb of Joseph, she was still at hand, marking where they laid Him. And as she was the last to leave the grave after the stone had been rolled over its mouth, so she was the first to reappear on the spot on the morning of the resurrection. She came with spices

to anoint the dead, for all her hopes had been buried in His sepulchre. But her affectionate interest in Him was rewarded in a manner she never dreamed of as possible. The grave was empty and angels were in possession ; and, in the dim light of the breaking morning, she saw, among the living, ONE whom, on account of the darkness, her blinding tears, and the pre-occupation of her mind, she failed at first to recognise, but whose well-remembered voice pronouncing her name of " Mary " soon recalled her to herself—the very Master whom she had never expected to see again. With a sudden rush the clouds flew away—the grey sky above her came to be overspread with glory—and a whole world of love and trust and reverence and wonder found expression in the adoring exclamation of " RABBONI."

CHAPTER V

THE CHURCH AND STATE OF HIS DAY

WHEN one who professes to be a religious reformer appears in a country and causes a large amount of popular commotion wherever he goes, the question cannot but be raised of how he stands related to the existing civil and ecclesiastical authorities. If he gathers crowds around him, whom he stirs by his eloquence, the magistrate must ask if it is in the public interest to allow such assemblies to be held, and if he is known to be disseminating ideas which seem to forbode the foundation of a new sect, it would be unreasonable to expect the surrounding Churches to look on with indifference.

But the situation thus indicated was very much that which existed in the days of the gospel, and it becomes necessary to inquire as to how the ministry of Christ was affected by the condition of the Church and State of His day.

Of course it is now a truism to say that if

there was to be anywhere a manifestation of the Son of God in the flesh, Judea was the country in which such an event could most fittingly take place. It was the land which God had promised to His chosen people, and of which He had actually put them in possession. It was the land, too, of inspiration, of prophecy, of miracles, of angels' visits, and of saints. And although when the new era came the gold had become sadly dim, there was even then a marked difference between it and the homes of the heathen nations.

When the theophany occurred, however, it was not under the conditions which prevailed before the Captivity. In these early days the Jews were free from foreign control, and the laws under which they lived formed part of a Divine constitution. If the Messiah had appeared at that time, it would have been seen that He was of the house of David and, perhaps, that He had undeniable claims to the theocratic crown. He would have been hailed, accordingly, as a Prince. He would have been brought up in a palace; and time-servers and flatterers might have sought to wait upon Him and to do homage to the Royal Preacher. Or, if for some reason, the nation had not been prepared to receive His testimony, the opposition offered to Him would have been of a very different kind from that which He encountered when He actually appeared in the world.

At the birth of Christ the Hebrew people

were in an evil case. The Holy Land had sunk into being a mere province of the great Roman Empire. The princely family of David had fallen into obscurity. And only such memorials of the ancient commonwealth remained as were tolerated by the indifference or the generosity of their conquerors.

When the Old Testament closes Palestine is represented as in the hands of the Persians. By and by the Persians were overcome by Alexander the Great, and the country then fell under his dominion. After his death the Macedonian Empire was broken up, and the land of Israel was tossed about from one tyrant to another until there arose in it the warlike race of the Maccabees. For upwards of a century this brave family maintained the independence of their country, but unhappily they began to quarrel among themselves, and the Romans being asked to interfere they took possession of Jerusalem in B.C. 163, and compelled the Jews to become tributary to the Empire.

It was while Palestine was under the rule of Rome that the incarnation and the crucifixion took place, but between the two events circumstances varied considerably. On the former occasion the representative of the imperial authority was Herod the Great, a man whom Dean Farrar describes as having inherited from his father "all his energy, his subtleness, his marked daring, his political ability, his magnificence, his personal beauty, and the singular

powers of fascination by which he won over in succession even the greatest of the Romans to support his cause." He "turned the tent of his Idumean ancestors into a regal palace, which was regarded during his lifetime as one of the most splendid in the world."¹

There can be no doubt that if this man had been spared to reign during the generation which succeeded the birth at Bethlehem, the ministry of Christ, as it was exercised, would have been (humanly speaking) impossible. By means of the extraordinary influence he was enabled to exert, his position was gradually strengthened and extended until he received from the senate the title of king, and was made the sovereign of a territory as vast as that which Solomon ruled over in all his glory. But it was not territorial dominion only which he coveted. It is believed that he cherished a greater ambition, even to found an independent kingdom in which, as it has been expressed, "the power of Judaism should subserve to the consolidation of a State." He was himself an Idumean—an Edomite—by descent, but the Idumeans, after they had been conquered by John Hyrcanus, had adopted Judaism as their national faith, and had become accustomed to think of Jerusalem as their mother city. Herod, therefore, was not absolutely an alien ruler; and the alarm which he displayed when he heard of one

¹ "The Herods," by F. W. Farrar, D.D., Dean of Canterbury.

who was "born King of the Jews," was not caused simply by the fear that the event might shake his power as a usurper, but because it threatened to disturb his purpose of setting up a kingdom in which religion was to play an important part. How much the prince of this world knew of what was then happening among the nations, or to what extent his influence was felt in controlling the course of events, we cannot tell, but it is a fact of no small significance that contemporaneously with the beginnings of a new Kingdom of God in the hands of his Messiah there should have been plans formed by a descendant of Esau for the setting up a kingdom of the world in which very different principles were to rule.

Death came to destroy this dream. There was a party formed to carry it out. Thirty years later there were "Herodians" with whom the Pharisees seem to have had some sympathy, and who (although we do not know much about them) appear to have cherished the hope of preventing their country from being under purely heathen rule. But the leader in the movement being taken away, the movement itself collapsed or remained only in the form of a vague aspiration. The dominion which had been wholly under Herod's control was divided among his sons; Archelaus having Idumea, Judea, and Samaria assigned to him, and to Herod Antipas being given the sovereignty of Galilee and Perea.

How much persecution the Redeemer escaped in consequence of these changes we are expressly told. The brutality of Herod the Great is regarded by contemporary historians as so entirely a commonplace that they do not think it worth their while to speak of the massacre at Bethlehem. Except for the Divine intervention, however, that atrocity might have had serious results. It demonstrated the fact that the Messiah could not live in the land of which such a man was the ruler, and for His security He was removed into another country. At the death of Herod the Child was brought back, but the change which had taken place in Judea was not such as to promise absolute safety even yet, and He was carried into Galilee, where He was permitted to grow up unmolested under the milder and more tolerant government of Antipas, God at the same time so ordering the course of events that, when it was necessary that the Christ should appear and testify for Him in Jerusalem, the power was gone out of the hands of Archelaus into those of the juster and more liberal Romans.

After the deposition of Archelaus, Judea was placed under the administration of pro-consuls appointed directly from Rome. At first these officers were frequently changed, but for some years previous to our Lord's leaving the obscurity of Nazareth the chief authority had been exercised by one who played a great part in the subsequent history—the weak but, so far,

honest governor, Pontius Pilate. Pilate lived mostly at Cæsarea, just as at this day Calcutta is the English capital of India and the ordinary residence of the Viceroy—but he had also a palace in Jerusalem, where a brigade of the army of occupation was always kept, and besides paying occasional visits to that city when occasion required he made a habit of regularly taking up his abode in it during the currency of the great feasts.

Practically the whole country was now under what we would call in our modern phraseology a Roman “Protectorate,” and the advantages which followed from that were so great and manifest that the presence is visible in it of the directing hand of a Divine Providence. Disturbing elements continued to exist and to prevent the free administration of those tolerant principles with which Rome sought to govern—and we know what mischief these elements were allowed to work. But it is to the “Protectorate” that Christ owed the liberty of action and teaching which He enjoyed, and its memory ought to be cherished gratefully by us in view of how much it contributed to the establishment of our religion.

In the meantime the framework of the Jewish Church had been left untouched, except where its operations tended to interfere with the exercise of the Roman supremacy. One serious encroachment had been made (it was begun by Herod) upon its integrity and independence.

The High Priesthood was no longer recognised as hereditary. The holders of the office were virtually the nominees of the Government and removeable at pleasure. The temple, however, was left standing, and the liberty of worshipping in it was preserved intact. Everywhere, also, there were synagogues to which the same toleration was extended; and although the tax-gatherer in every considerable town was a constant source of irritation, the Pharisees and the Sadducees were each allowed the entirest freedom to propagate their opinions, and the Sanhedrim, or chief council, of the nation had even quite an extraordinary latitude assigned to it. It was not only permitted to try, in a judicial way, all offenders against ecclesiastical law, but even to inflict upon those who were found guilty a certain amount of temporal punishment.

About Christ's position in this connection one thing may be said emphatically to begin with—that it would be a grievous mistake to represent Him as leaving, at the commencement of His ministry, the Church of the nation, and setting up with His disciples a dissenting community outside. The Jewish Church was a Divine institution, and it did not altogether cease to fulfil the purpose for which it was established until after the crucifixion, when indeed the rending of the veil which shut in the Holy of Holies did signify and proclaim the close of the dispensation. To have constituted

a new Church before that event would have been to be guilty of schism. The Christian Church, properly speaking, dates from the resurrection or from Pentecost.

What Christ inaugurated before His death was simply new evangelical movement, as it may be called, intended and fitted to awaken the Church of the time to a right understanding of its functions and its duties and to prepare for the crisis which was approaching. From first to last He acted not as dissenting from its creed and worship, but as a faithful adherent seeking only its highest good. Thus He was circumcised like other Jewish children, and on His presentation in the temple forty days after His birth the offering was made which the Law of Moses prescribed for the occasion. Then, when He entered on His own distinctive work, He did not set up sanctuaries for Himself, but, when He was in Jerusalem, He daily frequented the temple, and when He was in the country made it His custom to be present in the synagogue every Sabbath day. Nor did He neglect the great festivals of the Church. We know that He attended all the Passovers which were held during the currency of His ministry; we are also told expressly that He was in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of the Dedication, and we have it on record that He had just left the table, where He had partaken of the Paschal Lamb, when He was betrayed into the hands of His enemies.

(One of the very last acts of His life, therefore, was one of communion with the Church of His country.

(But although He thus showed His respect for what He regarded as a Divine institution, he had no cause to think or speak with equal reverence of the men into whose hands the management of it had fallen; and these were officially represented by the Sanhedrim, a court of great influence, the membership of which consisted of the High Priest, the Chief Priests, and certain Elders and Scribes. A body so constituted ought to have been above the suspicion of acting in an unintelligent and oppressive way, but what we hear of it in the Gospels does not convey the impression that it was highly qualified to lead in a critical time.

✓ The first occasion on which we hear of this court taking formal notice of the fact that an unusual religious stir had begun in the country was that of the sending of a deputation to the Baptist, asking who and what he professed himself to be. It was a hopeful-looking inquiry, one which seemed to indicate the existence in it of a sincere desire to deal in a candid spirit with any evidence which might be submitted to it. (But the motive which prompted the inquiry was probably by no means so good as it looked; for although John told them plainly that there stood One among them whose shoe's latchet He was not himself worthy to unloose, they showed no anxiety to be introduced to this person, nor

did they afterwards treat Jesus with greater respect because such high testimony had been borne to Him by one who was generally regarded as a prophet.

In course of time, however, Jesus was called on to meet the Sanhedrim face to face. This did not occur during His first visit to Jerusalem after His baptism, for then He was comparatively unknown — although even then he had a significant warning given to Him that His testimony would not be received by it in the circumstance that one of its members (Nicodemus) who wished to converse with Him did not dare to be seen in His company in open day. When the second Passover came round He was less of a stranger, and when He was seen to commit the enormity of curing the impotent man of Bethesda on the Sabbath day, the opportunity which this offence seemed to afford of putting a check upon His ministry was promptly taken advantage of. He was summoned for His breach of the law before the court, and we have in St. John's Gospel an account of the answer which He gave to the charge which was then brought against Him. In the course of that answer He reminded His judges of the testimony which had been borne to Him by the Baptist, and accompanied this with such extraordinary revelations of His own dignity and glory that they evidently felt themselves for the moment incompetent to deal with Him. He was dismissed accordingly, and retired.

into Galilee. There He was allowed to continue His labours unmolested. The Sanhedrim no doubt heard of His successes in that region, and heard of them with little satisfaction ; but it is plain that it had less power within the territory of the Tetrarch Herod than in the provinces which were more directly under the control of the Roman Senate, and although afterwards we find Saul of Tarsus setting out for Damascus carrying letters with him from the High Priest, which authorised him to lay hold of such Christians as he could discover there, and cast them into prison, we nowhere read of the council at Jerusalem, with all its enmity to Christ, pursuing Him into Galilee or into the outlying territory of Perea. Within Judea His life came to be in constant danger. Within the tetrarchy of Herod He was in comparative safety. Even at the close of His second visit to the Holy City, it is said of Him : " Jesus walked in Galilee, for He would not walk in Jewry because the Jews [meaning the Jewish authorities] sought to kill Him."

This resolution to confine Himself to the safe obscurity of Galilee lasted only until it came to be His duty to go up again to Jerusalem. The call to do so arrived with the approach of the Feast of Tabernacles. His visit to the Holy City was then made, to begin with, in an unobtrusive way. He went up not openly, but as it were in secret. But He could not be long hid, and the Sanhedrim, hearing of His presence

in the neighbourhood, sent officers to take Him into custody. And what happened throws a striking sidelight on the character and effects of His ministry. The officers—the familiars of the Jewish inquisition—mingled among the crowds who surrounded Him, watching for a favourable opportunity to accomplish His arrest, and were thus *perforce* compelled to listen to His preaching. We cannot suppose that they were by any means soft-hearted or impressible men. Rather as the agents of an institution such as they represented, they were probably very much the contrary. But, after all, they were *men*—Jewish men—with consciences and hearts capable of being touched by what they saw of beauty and goodness; and by and by they came back to their masters confused and empty-handed. The council was still in session, waiting impatiently for their intended victims, and when their officers appeared at the door exhibiting signs of a strange bewilderment, and without their prisoner, the angry question was hurled at them, “Why have ye not brought Him?” Perhaps they expected to hear of a tumult among the people, and of their warrant having been forcibly resisted, but what they did hear was more difficult to bear than even that. “Oh! sirs,” said the poor men in effect, “do not send us again on such an errand. We dare not lay a finger on Him. *Never man spake like that man.*” ✓

The commotion caused by this reply is graphically described by the evangelist: “Then

answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him? But these people who knoweth not the law are cursed." Nicodemus attempted to say a word in the interest of justice, but he simply drew, by his interference, the fire upon himself. And despairing apparently of being able to do anything more at the moment against the favourite of the hour, the meeting broke up in confusion, and every man retired to his own house.

Jesus appeared again in Jerusalem at a later period on the occasion of the Feast of the Dedication, when He found a home in the house of Lazarus, at Bethany. But now the leaders of the Jewish Church had so wrought upon the fanaticism of the people that He narrowly escaped being stoned, and as the time had not yet arrived for His being offered up, He very soon retired again across the Jordan so as to be under the jurisdiction of Herod in Perea.

From thence, however, He was shortly after recalled by the illness and death of Lazarus, and the extraordinary miracle which He performed in raising him from the dead became the means of bringing things finally to a crisis. A special meeting of the Sanhedrim was called to consider what steps could be taken to put an end to a movement which perhaps they now felt they had been treating too lightly, and the conclusion was come to that it would be useless to temporise any longer, and that Jesus must, at all

✓ risks, be put to death. They were not able, however, to accomplish their purpose immediately. Jesus, knowing what they threatened, and that His hour was not yet come, retired again for a season from the neighbourhood. But they were not now to be diverted from the pursuit. "They gave a commandment that if any man knew where He was he should show it, that they might take Him," and we can imagine their satisfaction when one of His own followers appeared at their board, and undertook for a paltry bribe to betray Him into their hands.

We all know the issue. Late at night Christ was arrested on a warrant given not by the civil government of the city, but by the chief council of the Jewish Church, and was hurried first to the house of Annas, where He underwent an informal examination, and then to the palace of the High Priest, where the Sanhedrim met, and deliberately declared Him to be guilty of a capital offence. This court, however, had no right to carry their own sentence into effect,—the sentence required to be countersigned by the Roman governor. To secure that, an appeal was made to Pilate, and partly through the fanaticism of the masses who were moved to demand it, and ✓ partly through the fears of the judge who was ✓ threatened with the displeasure of Cæsar if he did not do as he was asked—the crucifixion of the Son of God was assented to, and actually carried into effect.

Now, in looking back upon all that, what do

we learn as to Christ's ecclesiastical surroundings? We see that the Jewish Church, through the court by which it was officially represented, not only rejected Him, but pursued Him from the beginning of His ministry to the end of it with a relentless enmity which leaves us in no doubt as to its relation to the new revelation of Himself which God was giving to the world. The Sanhedrim never allowed itself candidly to consider the Redeemer's claims. It made His visits to Jerusalem to be always full of personal risk. It compelled Him to expend His labours, not on the religious metropolis of His country, but on its outlying provinces. And, as we read the story as it is told in the Gospels, we feel that we have constant occasion to rejoice that the sphere within which He taught was under the jurisdiction not of a Hebrew but of a heathen power; for if the Jewish council had possessed the right of inflicting death, and if it could have sent its emissaries to Bethabara and Capernaum as freely as to Bethany and Bethlehem, it is plain that if there had been no miraculous interposition, the career of the Messiah would have been prematurely interrupted.

In looking round, however, on the Jewish Church and nation at this time, we are less impressed by the presence in the country of an ecclesiastical council, concerning itself about purity of doctrine and worship, than by the activity of certain religious sects or parties claiming to be the leaders of public opinion and

life. Chief among these were three, which, it is said, always appear on the surface and in conflict when positive religion is beginning to decay. First, there were the intolerant *Traditionalists*, who, under the popular name of Pharisees, clung to the letter of the old faith, and insisted on making that letter everything. Next there were the *Rationalists*—the Sadducees—who refused to admit anything to be true which they could not see through and understand. And, finally, there were the *Mystics*, or extreme Spiritualists, who shrank alike from the formalism of the Pharisee and the scepticism of the Sadducee, and who are known in history by the title of Essenes.

With the two first of these sects the Gospels make us well acquainted. They tell us, too, how Christ treated them—denouncing with unsparing severity the hollowness and hypocrisy of the one and exposing with equal force the illogical reasoning of the other. The name of the third party does not occur in the New Testament, but we may assume that our Lord referred to it when he spoke, for example, of some who were “eunuchs for the kingdom of God’s sake”; and if John the Baptist was not by profession an Essene there was much in his life to suggest that he was one, at least at one period of his history. The sect arose about two centuries before Christ, and consisted of a society of piously disposed men who sought, amid the solitudes lying to the west of

the Dead Sea, a grateful refuge from the strifes and corruptions of the world. Religion was with them much more of a reality and a power than it was with the Pharisees, but while the latter erred in being too ostentatious—praying at the corners of busy streets in order to be seen of men—the latter erred as much on the other side in secluding themselves from society and in cherishing a piety that was at once selfish and unpractical. There can be no doubt, however, that they did something in those dark days, to preserve the warmth and vitality of Judaism, and as it is impossible to believe that the Great Teacher of the time never came into personal contact with any of them, we may ascribe His silence about their character and influence to the fact that He saw in them more to commend than condemn, and that He trusted to His own active social and benevolent life to give them just ideas of what God expects from those who desire to serve Him.

It is quite likely that among the Essenes, as a party, there was more sympathy with Christ's work than among any other section of the Jewish people, but that sympathy was not expressed in any formal manner, so that we may say that neither from the supreme council of the Church nor from any of its leading religious sects did He receive any open encouragement. There were individual men who made themselves exceptions to that general

rule, but the Josephs and Nicodemuses were exceedingly few, and if the success of the ministry of Christ had depended either on the sanction of the ecclesiastical courts or on the support of prominent men in them the results would have been much less satisfactory than they actually turned out to be.

But by whom, then, was He sustained? We answer, First of all by the chosen few who were to be met with up and down the country, and who were waiting not for some gallant military leader to help them to throw off the Roman yoke but for the coming of that promised Messiah on whom they depended to bring spiritual consolation to Israel. Of this number were, for example, Simeon and Anna, and the Virgin Mary, and John the Baptist, and Nathanael, and also, we should guess, not a few of those who gathered to Bethabara during the continuance of that great religious awakening which preceded and ushered in the days of the gospel.

Apart from that class of persons, the liberty which Christ enjoyed of preaching for even so long a period as three years was no doubt largely due to the hold which He soon established for Himself on the respect and love of the common people. The extent to which that respect stood Him in stead when the tide of ecclesiastical enmity was running strongly against him seems not a little remarkable. One thing is particularly striking. It is that it was

(the sympathy of the masses that kept the synagogues open to Him and that secured to Him the freedom of speech which He enjoyed within the precincts of the temple itself. Occasionally, indeed, the spirit of fanaticism was roused among them by the persistent misrepresentations of the Priests and Scribes, and, under its influence, they would at one time have stoned Him and at another cast Him over a precipice, and in the end did actually put Him to death, yet on the whole, and when left to themselves, the people were favourable to Him—and it was in a great measure on that account that He was allowed to carry on His work for so long a period unmolested.

Nor is it difficult to explain how He won the regard of the masses. He was one of them-
 selves. He lived notoriously a blameless life.
 ✓ He went about continually doing good. And
 (His preaching was at once so plain, so interesting, and so heart-stirring that they could not help listening to it gladly. May it not be added that although His conduct in that connection grievously offended the Pharisees, the common people did not probably think the less of Him that He befriended the degraded sections of the community? Among Jewish men, there was no class which was regarded as so utterly lost as that of the publicans; and among Jewish women there were no such outcasts as those who earned their living by sin. But after all, they were every one of them the children of

Abraham—and some at least would sooner or later be touched by the spectacle of His holding out a hand to such and proving that their restoration was not impossible.

But His whole attitude, as revealed in His teaching, showed that He had always the highest interests of the nation at heart. Thus He so identified Himself with the race that He felt a patriot's pangs as He thought of the approaching destruction of the capital. The pathetic lament—"O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! how often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings; but ye would not"—comes from the heart not merely of a man but of a Jew.

Then this too has to be remembered—that as He did not proceed to set up a new Church in Judea, so He did not address Himself to the teaching of a new system of theology. The position which He uniformly took up was, that the Pharisees were the innovators while He was the faithful interpreter of Moses and the Prophets, and was only anxious to work out the idea of the Church as it was originally constituted. They had allowed the national conception of the character of Jehovah to become obscure or distorted,—it was His aim to make known again God as He is. They had overlaid the Old Testament with a mass of human traditions—His wish was to rescue the Scriptures from their degraded position and restore them to their rightful place of supreme authority. Institutions

Purification

✓ of the most important kind—such as the Sabbath, and Public Prayer and Almsgiving—had by them been so caricatured and corrupted as to have become little better than superstitious observances, He made it His business to relieve them of their objectionable adjuncts and reinstate them in the place they were intended to fill. And further, in what He said about sin, and the essential principles of morality and the way of reconciliation to God, He did not differ from the holy men of old who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, but only put into more perfect form what they were endeavouring to express.

X In short Christianity is only the flower of which Judaism was the seed, and Jesus Christ, when setting up an apparently new religion, was far more really in the heart of the Jewish Church and a truer exponent of its fundamental meaning than was the great Sanhedrim when, in its professed zeal for the ancient faith, it condemned Him as a heretic and a blasphemer.

✓ This, however, is to be noted in the last place, that His touching interest in the Jewish nation was not merely of that natural and, so far sentimental, kind which moved so many of its citizens to cling to it with a passionate affection even after the great purpose for which it was constituted had been served. He had His patriotic feelings, as we have seen. Referring to His special mission He said : “ I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”

And even after His resurrection He gave commandment to the first bearers of the glad tidings to the world to "begin at Jerusalem."

(But in the end of all He showed a horizon which was immensely extended. His eye which before had confined itself in its range to the narrow kingdom of Israel, now looked far further afield. And with a yearning desire for the spiritual emancipation of all the race, has broke through all restraining limitations, and issued this great commission to His Church,
✓ "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

CHAPTER VI

WHAT IGNORANCE HE MET WITH

OF all heathen lands it may be said that they are among "the dark places of the earth." Greece and Rome of old made great progress in various directions, and the same may be said of several countries in our modern world. But in those matters which are of supremest interest to us as immortal and responsible beings, not one of them has been able to attain to knowledge which is recognised to be of a satisfactory kind. Even in regard to what may, in some respects, be spoken of as an elementary question—that of the nature of God—they are all at sea, feeling after Him if haply they might find Him—but ever vainly.

As compared with such countries the land of Israel enjoyed unspeakable advantages. The great name of Jehovah had been revealed to its inhabitants, and much had been made known to them as to His will and the means of their reconciliation to Him. But when the advent took place a heavy cloud was found to be

resting on the whole race. "The people sat in darkness." And what happened when Christ came is told in the words of the prophet—"They saw a great light. To them which sat in the region and shadow of death, light sprang up."

What was it in regard to which the Redeemer found ignorance prevailing?

I. It may be said that the masses knew little of the true God.

They were not, indeed, idolaters. They were not now in the habit of carving out for themselves images of wood and stone. The terrible experiences of their fathers had cured them of all tendency to go in that direction. But it is possible to form in the mind a conception of the Deity which shall be as false a representation of the reality as anything to be found in a heathen temple; and that was the condition of things in Israel when the Messiah appeared.

1. The great God had grown to be virtually a local Divinity.

Not that they thought of Him as having no power over the nations. On the contrary they believed that He could always punish them if they dared to afflict His chosen people. But He had, they conceived, no personal interest in the Gentiles. He was in no sense their Ruler, their Providence, their Judge, and He had absolutely no concern with their well-being or with their destiny. In plain words, Jehovah was, strictly speaking, only the God of the Jews.

2. The God whom they worshipped was one

whom they supposed to be pleased and satisfied with merely outward forms and ceremonies.

The Pharisee who prayed in the temple may be taken as a typical religious man of the period ; and on what did he rest his hope of acceptance ? It was that he “fasted twice in the week and gave tithes of all that he possessed.” That is to say this man—representing the convictions current at the time—was fully persuaded that what God felt Himself honoured by was a scrupulous attention, on the part of His worshippers, to the formalities of religion—an idea which could not for a moment have been entertained if he had known that “God is a Spirit, and that those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.”

3. Yet another error was common in this age. It was that Jehovah was a God, in whose eyes the highest morality consists in a merely external obedience to the commandments.

The Pharisee in the temple had not merely a religion but a morality in which he trusted. It was that he was not an extortioner, nor an unjust person, nor an adulterer, nor even as the publicans. It was not very much to boast of. But his self-satisfaction was perfect. “What,” he thought, “could God want more ?” And in fact the God, before whom he vowed, could not want more. His God, however, was not the One whom his own Scripture revealed. That great Being had been lost sight of, and another enthroned in His room.

II. Here, then, was a state of things with which Christ was required to deal. Israel had forgotten the true God, and it was necessary that there should be a fresh revelation of His nature,—that He might remove the ignorance prevailing on this subject. What He did was, in the first place, to make it known that Jehovah was not the God of the Jews only, but had an interest in the whole race. Early in His ministry this great declaration was made, that “God so loved THE WORLD, that He gave His only begotten Son, that WHOSOEVER believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life,” and toward its close this was the commission which was given to His followers: “Go and disciple all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.” It was a new idea that was thrown into the heart of the Jewish society of the time—that God was concerned about “the world,” and was prepared to show mercy even to men who were not circumcised. Although it was not the case that the idea had never been heard of before in the Hebrew commonwealth, for once and again in the Prophets glimpses were given of the opening of a door of hope to the outlying nations—as, for example, in Isaiah, where we read: “In that day there shall be a root of Jesse which shall stand for an ensign of the people—to it shall the Gentiles seek.” And again: “The Gentiles shall come to Thy light and kings to the brightness of Thy coming.” It

was no novelty, then, that was spoken of, but simply the revival of an old truth.

As to the kind of being whom they were called to worship, one can see how different He was from their conception of Him by such a description as this—a description which must have been of the nature of a revelation to a Pharisee.

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth. That thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues, and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But thou when thou prayest enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret, and Thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”

The God whose character is thus indicated was plainly one who desired reality, and could be satisfied with no homage but that which was from the heart.

At the same time, far more was revealed in the teaching of Christ about the Divine nature than what was necessary to correct the prevalent illusions about it. He made known to the world certain *new facts* about God, of which men but for Him would have remained for ever in ignorance.

(1) Among these may be named that of the Divine Fatherhood. Glimpses of that, indeed, appear now and again even in the Old Testament, but it is in the Gospels that we meet the doctrine in its fulness. There we are made to see that the title is not a merely metaphorical one. "Seek not ye," said Christ to His disciples, "what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink. *Your Father knoweth that ye have need of all those things.*" "If ye, being evil," He said again, "know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father in heaven give good things to them that ask Him." We have in these words such a recognition of the paternal relation as warrants us in assuring all God's children that they will be cared for and provided for. Then in the parable of the prodigal son, the reception given to the returning penitent is a revelation of the Father's heart ; while the preparation of a prayer whose terms imply that it is to be used every day, indicates the attitude in which God wishes that He shall be always regarded.

These views were all new, even to the disciples. And it is not surprising to learn that

at first they could not take them in ; hence the appeal of Philip : " Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." It was well that that appeal was made, because it led to a further revelation : " Have I been so long time with you," said Christ, " and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? *He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.* And how sayest thou then, show us the Father?" In one of the later books of the New Testament Christ is spoken of as " the image of the invisible God," and what that implies may be gathered from His answer to Philip. His likeness to the Father is so perfect that if we know the one we shall know the other. And this is a great truth, for it is surely much to be entitled to conclude that we see a manifestation of the Divine nature in the holiness of the Saviour, His hatred of sin, His compassion for sinners, His readiness to forgive, His accessibility, and His beneficence. Until the Redeemer lived in the world men had a most inadequate conception of the character and glory of God.

(2) There was, however, yet another revelation which could never have come to us but through One who came to speak to us from heaven. In Christ's teaching we find made known something in regard to the mystery of the constitution of the Godhead. He did not, indeed, in so many words, proclaim the doctrine of the Trinity—but He speaks so plainly of the existence of Three Persons, each of them possessing Divine

attributes, and, at the same time, of their unity—that the acceptance of that doctrine is felt, by those who believe in inspiration, to be unavoidable.

Thus He speaks frequently of the Holy Ghost, and He does so in a manner to produce in us a feeling of awe. “He that blasphemeth,” He says, “against the Holy Ghost, hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.” The Holy Ghost is associated in history with His birth, with the commencement of His ministry and the exercise of it, with the atonement, with the process of regeneration, and with the conduct and success of His work in the world. So important was His agency in the great enterprise of redemption, that His presence on the earth was regarded as more than compensating for the absence of the Saviour Himself. “It is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come to you.” This great Person is described as proceeding from the Father, and as given by the Son—implying His independence in a sense of both—but that He could have been a creature appears, from all we know of Him, to be inconceivable.

Of Himself, also, Christ speaks in a manner which would have more than justified His condemnation if He had not been really the Divine Son of God. “Before Abraham was, I am.” “I and My Father are One.” “The dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they

that hear shall live." "I give unto [My sheep] eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of My hands." "Believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in me." "Now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was." It is not credible that any creature could dare to use language like what we have quoted, unless he were a fanatic or imbecile. But even His enemies admit that no one in the world ever lived a life so noble as His, and that "never man spake like that man." Those, then, who refuse to recognise His Divinity have a really insoluble problem to deal with—to show how He was not what He appeared to claim to be, and yet how One so wise and good did nothing to disabuse His hearers' minds of impressions which His words in their very nature were fitted to convey. Either He was in an ineffable sense the Son of God, or He was guilty of deliberate imposture.

The Divinity of "the Father" no one questions, but here are two other Persons whose Divinity seems equally certain, and as the doctrine of the unity of the Godhead cannot possibly be disputed, we are shut up to the great fact of the existence of the Trinity—a fact, it must be added, of far more than merely speculative interest. The truth is that by its help alone can we come to understand the significance of the gospel. To each Person special functions

are assigned. It is the Father who loves the world and gives the Son. It is the Son who came here to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And it is the Spirit who persuades and enables men to receive Jesus Christ as He is freely offered to us in the gospel.

III. It may be said of Christ, as of the Scriptures, that the chief end of His teaching was to show us what we are to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of men. We have spoken of some of the things which He taught concerning God—we may now inquire what light He came to throw on the subject of human duty. On this subject there existed at this time widespread ignorance, especially in two connections—first in reference to the question of how sinners may hope to attain to a state of acceptance with God, and second as to the kind of life which He expects His people to live.

I. There was no doubt a remnant to be found who were looking forward to the coming of the Messiah, and trusting more or less intelligently in His mediation. But the masses appear to have cherished no expectation of anything except that of a temporal deliverance, or if they ever thought of the danger of sin and the coming of a judgment, they usually rested their hopes of escape on the circumstance that they were the children of Abraham. This, of course, could not satisfy all. Some must now and again have realised salvation to be a per-

sonal matter, and one requiring to be dealt with in a personal way ; but for them a resource was found in the sacrifices of the temple. It is evident, however, that many found no difficulty in establishing claims of their own. The rampant Phariseeism of the period showed how easy it was to become assured of the possession of a righteousness, on the strength of which a hope of acceptance could be reposed with confidence. And yet we have more than one proof that the light enjoyed was not satisfying. For this was one of the questions which was submitted to Christ : " What must I do to inherit eternal life ? "—a question which would not have been put to Him if the teachers of the time had been regarded as competent to answer it.

Amid all this confusion no greater benefit could have been conferred on any community than the coming into it of one who had a conclusive answer to give to the question of what we must do to be saved. And such an answer Christ professed to be able to give. It is true that ever since His day many are still at sea, and wide differences exist as to the grounds on which sinners may hope for acceptance with God. But this is certain, that His advent brought new light on that subject into the world, and that with more or less of intelligence the best instructed nations in the world are at this moment looking to Him as the Redeemer. But what did He preach?

(1) He preached *Himself*. He offered Him-

self as the one object for the world's contemplation, the one channel through which salvation could come to any. "I am the Way," He said, "the Truth, and the Life, no man cometh unto the Father but by ME." "I am the Resurrection and the Life, he that believeth on Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in ME shall never die." "Whosoever shall confess ME before men, him will I also confess before My Father which is in heaven." "Abide in ME and I in you: as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me. For without ME ye can do nothing." "Ye will not come unto ME that ye might have life." "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto ME." Whether all this is true teaching or not there can be no doubt about its meaning and significance. It proclaims this great thought—that salvation is to be found only in Christ.

But (2) how can we get the salvation which is in Him? The answer to that question is given with equal explicitness. It is by believing on Him. "Whosoever believeth on Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." "If ye believe not that I am He ye shall die in your sins." "These things are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through His name." "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on Me hath ever

lasting life." To those who were trusting in their descent from Abraham He said: It is a broken reed on which you are depending. "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." To such as dreamt of establishing before God a claim of merit, He spoke this warning word: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." Speaking of the confidence placed in the temple services, He reminded those who listened to Him that God attached greater value to mercy than to animal sacrifices. And while presenting Himself to them as the only possible Saviour, all He asked of them was trust in His mediation.

All other religions except the Christian, it may be added, have limited the bestowment of their benefits to classes. In the opinion of a Jew it is necessary to become a Jew in order to obtain the Divine favour. The Greeks had their mysteries, which were revealed only to the initiated. Mohammedans promise little in the coming future to women. And under no pagan system has much notice been ever taken of the children. In all Hebrew and Gentile lands alike, too, there have always been pariahs and publicans—outcasts who were reckoned beyond the pale. On the other hand, it is the glory of the religion of Christ that the commission given to its earliest propagators ran in these words: "Go ye into all the world, and

preach the gospel *unto every creature*. Race, colour, history is to be no barrier to the acceptance of any one. It will not signify whether a sinful man is old or young—whether he has great mental endowments, or none at all—or even whether he has kept all the commandments from his youth up, or has broken every one of them. The door is open to the world, and we may go into the palace of a king, or into the cottage of a peasant—into the home of a philanthropist, and the cell of a condemned criminal—and give to each identically the same message: “God is, in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses to those who believe in Jesus,” and “Whosoever will may take of the water of life freely.”

This method of salvation through Christ and by faith in Him is proclaimed in all the teaching which we find in the Gospels, and if any are still ignorant of it it is either because its nature has not been communicated to them or because they have failed to understand it. In any case this is an indisputable fact, that since Christ came the subject is no longer where it was. He has come a Light into the world, and those who follow Him will not abide in darkness.

2. Another thing in connection with which gross ignorance prevailed in Israel when Christ came was as to the character of the life which God expects men to live here.

What low views were current on this subject

we have had occasion again and again to refer to. But even suppose we do not accept the Pharisees as representing the public opinion of the period, it is certain that never before had such teaching been heard as that which we find in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes alone principles were enunciated whose novelty must have been recognised by every hearer, and as the discourse unfolded itself representations were given of what men behoved to be and do which could not but have conveyed to all previously imagined ideas of life and duty.

He had not come, He said, to annul the law ; He had come to fulfil and enforce it. But the law, He told them, was broader than they were supposing. It was not murder and adultery alone which it condemned. It was the anger out of which the murder sprang and the look which led to the sinful action. And so all-important was obedience to the commandments that any sacrifice—even to the loss of a right hand or a right eye—was to be endured rather than it should not be rendered. Then the ideal life was to be one of outward blamelessness and utter unselfishness. Oaths of every kind were to be avoided. Injuries were to be borne with meekness. Help was to be given when needed to all who asked for it. And even enemies were to be loved instead of being hated. Further, in making a profession of religion, they were to avoid ostentation, neither praying nor bestowing alms in a way to call forth the notice

of lookers-on, and while they were to cherish a constant sense of dependence upon God—praying to Him daily, and seeking first the interests of His kingdom—they were to avoid censoriousness and show a much greater anxiety about being delivered from their own faults than about discovering and proclaiming the faults of others.

The Sermon on the Mount, in short, has ever been regarded as one of the most striking of our evidences for the Divine origin of Christianity. We would, it is universally acknowledged, see around us a better and happier world if its principles were to prevail, and what purpose any one could have in proclaiming such principles if their inspiration did not come from above it is extremely difficult to see.

CHAPTER VII

AMONG THE POOR

JUDGED by appearances, the birth and upbringing of Jesus Christ were of the humblest description. If His parents had possessed much of that money "which purchaseth all things," it is hardly likely that no place would have been found for His advent except a stable. But they were too poor to command any better shelter, and it remains on record that when the Redeemer came on His mission of mercy into the world there was found no room for Him, even in an inn.

His reputed father was a village carpenter, and there is every reason to believe that He Himself, in His youth, wrought at the same occupation. This is plainly suggested by the question which was asked by the people of Nazareth when He revisited the town after He had commenced His public ministry. "*Is not this the CARPENTER?*" they said; and don't we all know His family and everything about Him? This

fact, as has been truly said, is one of "permanent significance to Christianity."¹

No change for the better is described as taking place in His after-life. To say that He had no personal wants—that He hungered and thirsted and suffered pain and grew weary—of course signifies nothing. All that only illustrates the truth that He was verily a man. But at least two things are mentioned in the Gospels which show, in an affecting way, that the world never smiled on Him—that He continued to be poor to the end. One is that when, on a certain occasion, a man offered to attach himself to His society, in the belief, apparently, that something would be gained by doing so, Christ replied in a way which intimated that, so far as this world was concerned, those who became His disciples had nothing to expect. "The foxes," he said, "have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head." The other is, in its way, almost more suggestive. It is that for His subsistence while carrying on His evangelistic work He depended on the voluntary contributions of women who followed Him from Galilee and "ministered to Him of their substance."

We have here again to notice in how many ways Christ has qualified Himself to act as our advocate and intercessor. There are many more poor in the world than any other class, and no class stands in greater need of sympathy.

¹ Professor Bruce on "The Providential Order."

How much it helps us, then, when we are able to say to those who are destitute that we have in Jesus Christ not merely One who can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, seeing that He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin, but one also who can understand the trials of the poor because He was Himself poor when He tabernacled among us !

But the question remains, What attitude did He sustain to the poor while He was living in the world ?

The first thing in answer which arrests our attention is that He selected His own immediate followers from among the poor. He who "called unto Him whom He would, and they came unto Him," and whose summonses therefore would have been irresistible, might have chosen His disciples from among the Priests or from among the richer and better educated Pharisees. But He addresses Himself instead to the fisherfolk on the Lake of Galilee ; and to several of them He committed the weightiest matters of His kingdom. That these men had, in His company, experience of sufficiently hard times now and then is suggested by the incident that one morning they were accused of sabbath - breaking, because they plucked ears of corn while passing through a field, and were defended by their Master on the ground that they were hungry and had nothing better to eat. No doubt they met in

the long run their reward for leaving their all to follow Christ, but while they were with Him they must have shared His lot, and hence must have been sometimes without the shelter of a roof.

Outside this inner circle the poor who came across His path were never passed by as unworthy of His notice. Among those on whose behalf He exerted His miraculous powers were blind beggars whose sight He restored. One day, while sitting over against the treasury, into which the rich were ostentatiously casting their contributions, He called the special attention of His disciples to a poor widow who had nothing to give but two mites, which make a farthing, but whose liberality He extolled as greater than that of the many who were giving of their superfluity. And in an incidental way we learn that He Himself was in the habit of devoting a portion of His scanty means to charity. When, before the last supper, He commanded Judas to retire and to do what was in his heart quickly, the onlookers were perplexed. They could not imagine on what business their fellow-disciple was being despatched. But at last an explanation suggested itself. Judas, they knew, bare the bag, and they concluded that he was being directed to give something to the poor. To all this we may add that there is a significance of its own in the circumstance that in the description given to Jesus' disciples of the characteristic features of the Messiah's work this is specially

noticed—that the gospel was being preached to *the poor*.

With regard to the question of how the poor should be treated, several instructive indications are given in the teaching of Christ.

For one thing, He made it plain that it is perilous to overlook them—to pay no heed to their wants. That was the offence with which the rich man of the parable was chargeable. Lazarus lay at his gate—a most pitiable object, for he was not only dependent on charity for his daily bread, but was afflicted with sores which he had not rags enough to cover. But as Dives drove back and forward to his house, he passed the beggar by with callous indifference, and probably did not know so much as that the man was being fed with crumbs from his own table. It was not the case, however, that he failed to notice Lazarus at his door, or remained absolutely unacquainted with his condition or his character. When he was in hell he recognised the beggar in Abraham's bosom, and was not, apparently, astonished at his presence there. His neglect, then, was not only complete but deliberate; and his conduct is spoken of as one of the leading circumstances calling for his condemnation. The lesson of the story, then, is a simple one. Helping the poor at our door is a duty which we shall neglect at our peril.

This lesson is enforced in what was said to the guests who had gathered in such numbers

in the house of a chief Pharisee. Remarking the unseemly struggle which went on among them for the chief places at the feast, He said : " When thou makest a dinner or supper call not thy friends nor thy brethren nor thy kinsmen nor thy rich neighbours. . . . But when thou makest a feast, call the poor . . . for they cannot recompense thee, but thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

And yet in another place He shows how charity may be shorn of all its grace. " Take heed," he said, " that ye do not your alms to be seen of men. . . . When thou doest thine alms, do not send a trumpet before thee. . . . But when thou doest thine alms let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth. That thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

With all this, Christ had something to say to the poor themselves.

Their position, He would have them understand, is by no means an unhopeful one. In the opinion of His disciples, indeed, it was full of discouragements. They knew so well by experience its hampering conditions that when their Master said one day in their hearing, " How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven," they were beyond measure astonished, and said, " Who, then, can be saved ?" Looking at life from their point of view, the spiritual prospects of the rich seemed so very much brighter than those of the poor

that to speak of their future as being so extraordinarily dark appeared to them absolutely inconceivable. At the same time they could not think that grace was confined to the rich. They knew that they themselves, though poor, had been chosen, and they were no doubt acquainted with men in their own circles whose faith was equal to that of Lazarus. But Christ made them understand that He recognised the difficulties of both classes. In describing the hindrances which always, more or less, lie in the way of the good seed of the Word coming to perfection, He coupled together two evils which affect the growth of each—"the cares of this world" (one of the greatest of which is poverty) and "the deceitfulness of riches."

The ideal state to which He seeks to lift His followers is that of freedom from all needless and useless anxiety. "Seek ye first," He said to them—"seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and [all things that you absolutely require for the present life] shall be added unto you." "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink—nor yet for your body what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Consider the lilies of the field how they grow. . . . Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith."

Of His power to make good the promises

which are virtually contained in these words the disciples had themselves had experience. When they were sent forth on their first independent evangelistic tour, they were furnished with no material guarantees for their daily support. But when they returned and the question was put to them, "When I sent you without purse or scrip or shoes, lacked ye anything?" their answer was prompt and unhesitating: "Nothing," they said. He who had given them a commission to execute on His behalf had, in sending them forth, undertaken to support them till their work was done, and He had been as good as His word. All that they had needed had been provided, and their faith in this way had received a lesson—a lesson which is good for all time because it teaches this to every believer, however resourceless he may be in himself—that no one who is engaged in work which has been assigned to him by God will be suffered to want for anything he really needs.

But there remains one other incident in the life of Christ in connection with which some very significant instruction is given on the subject of the position of the poor.

Six days before his last Passover Jesus, with His disciples, went up to Jerusalem and found a home in the house of Lazarus at Bethany. There, while he was sitting one evening at supper, Mary took it upon her to show her love to him in an extraordinary way. Bringing into

the room a pound of ointment, very costly, she anointed with it the feet of her Lord and wiped them with her hair. This conduct, while it probably surprised all, gave deep offence to one of the onlookers—Judas Iscariot. To him the proceeding appeared monstrous, involving a reckless amount of unnecessary waste, and, unable to control his feelings, he gave expression to his dissatisfaction by saying aloud, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor?" To his comment, considered in itself, not very much attention perhaps was paid. His remark had in it a sound of common sense. But then his character was known, and his criticism was discounted. "This he said not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the bag and bare what was put therein." Mary, however, was no doubt hurt, and the sympathy of some of those whose good opinion she valued was not heartily with her. And hence the Master Himself was moved to explain and to justify the act. "Let her alone," He said; "against the day of My burying hath she kept this. For the poor always you have with you, but Me ye have not always."

There are two lessons taught here. One is that the wants of the poor are not always peremptory and paramount. Those who need are never far away, and there is never a moment when they cannot be helped with advantage. But claims may arise which are more pressing

because they are more urgent. The opportunity for attending to them may pass away never to return, and not to embrace it may prove to be a source of everlasting regret. Such an occasion had occurred now. Christ was on the eve of His death. Never again would Mary have the chance of showing her love to Him in the way she adopted, and the extraordinary circumstances more than justified the apparent extravagance. When in doubt as to which duty should be performed, that one ought certainly to have the preference which will never be done if not done at once. The poor ye have always with you, and they may be relieved at any time. But Me ye have not always, and if any service is to be rendered to Me it must be now or never.

Underlying this obvious lesson, however, is another which does not quite appear on the surface. It is that there are spiritual acts which are of greater importance and are more far-reaching in their consequences than any act whose issues are only of a temporary and material kind. The homage which Mary offered to Christ can be justified not only on the ground of the urgency of the occasion, but in and for itself; and of this a significant intimation was given which was uttered in connection with it in the prophecy. "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her."

It is a familiar charge which is brought against the missionary enterprises of the Church that they involve the expenditure of money which might be much more usefully employed otherwise. Why, it is often asked, go to the ends of the earth when there is so much to do at home? Why waste your resources in converting Jews and Gentiles when there are so many poor needing bread at our doors? There is one ready answer to this. It is what was suggested of old. The criticism is not honest. It does not spring from any real consuming love for the poor, as is made quite certain by this—that they themselves are generally devoting themselves less to their relief than many of those whose conduct they are condemning. What is at the bottom of their complaints is simply an incapacity to realise the value of spiritual agencies and spiritual results; but it is no more possible to make them understand this than it was at the time to convince Judas that it was no extravagance of which Mary was guilty.

Apart from all that, it is not in the least inconceivable that to any one of us there may come an occasion when we shall be called on to decide whether we are to confer an immediate temporal benefit on an individual or to make some sacrifice in the interest of the kingdom of Christ. What to do in the circumstances will have to be decided by us, each for himself, by the help of such light as may be vouchsafed to us at the time. But, with the

example of Mary before us, we must be prepared to be accused even of eccentricity, for the higher law may seem to us so imperative as to overrule all considerations of human wisdom and to constrain us to do what the common sense of the world condemns. "The poor we have always with us," but not Christ.

Finally, on the general subject of Christ and the poor, we are reminded that although He established no refuges for the destitute and took no part in the discussion of those economical problems which have so often engaged the attention of men, He yet, by His life and teaching, contributed, more than any other social reformer, to improve and render more tolerable the condition of the many who have had little of the world to comfort them. For whenever the morality of the Sermon on the Mount comes to prevail, and the principle of carefulness grows to be regarded as He Himself exemplified in it when, after feeding the thousand He directed His disciples to gather up the fragments that nothing might be lost, the destitution of the world will certainly become less and less. For after all, what is at the root of much of the want which we now deplore is not that there is not bread enough in the world and to spare, but that injustice or indolence hinders the distribution of what is supplied or that what is supplied is wasted.

CHAPTER VIII

WITH THE RICH

ALTHOUGH Jesus Christ was born in a low estate and lived all His days a life of privation, it was not because He could not help Himself. He chose poverty deliberately. He became poor of His own accord, that we through His poverty might be made rich. All the while He had resources at command which enabled Him to meet every emergency as it arose. Thus, on two occasions He spread tables in the wilderness and fed abundantly thousands of people. Twice over He filled to breaking the nets of His disciples with miraculous draughts of fishes. And when He needed money to pay the tribute, an ass on which to ride into Jerusalem, and a room in which to keep the Passover, He had just to speak the word and all were provided. While, then, it may be said that He could lay Himself alongside the poor and enter into all their feelings, it is equally true that He could enter into the mind of a rich man and sympathise with all his temptations.

In the course of His ministry He was brought into contact with several rich men, each of whom may be thought of as the representative of a class.

1. He met a rich *Publican*. The occupation of such a man was a very remunerative one in a money point of view, but it was not popular and the best set of people would have nothing to do with it. Besides, no one could engage in it without the risk of moral injury to himself. The revenue was farmed, and any one who undertook to gather any portion of it was tempted to bring "false accusations" against householders with the view of not merely making up his rent but of securing some profit in addition. It was not a very reputable class, therefore, which the publicans formed, and as Jesus was generally understood to be politically on the Jewish rather than on the Roman side, one would not have expected any number of the order to be attracted to Him. As a matter of fact, however, a good many seem to have been moved, and the Master actually spoke more kindly of them than of the Pharisees. How is this to be accounted for? Probably in this way. In the first place, after all, they were the children of Abraham open to be affected by the influences which told on the race generally. Then, although they were thriving in a worldly way, some of them may never have been quite easy in their consciences. And lastly, it was something to hear of a great

Teacher who had kindly words even for them, and who, in the gospel which He preached, made sinners of all kinds as welcome to come to Him as He made the Scribes and Pharisees. Anyhow we find publicans amongst the number of His followers (one of them even became an apostle), and one of the most interesting stories told in His life is that in which the chief place is taken by a prominent member of the profession.

It was in Jericho where this man was met. He was the chief among the publicans and he was rich. How he came to have an interest in Christ is not said. But a picturesque account is given of the circumstances under which their first interview occurred. Zaccheus was anxious to see the great Teacher, but a crowd continually surrounded Him and, being little of stature, he could not hope to get a satisfactory view over the people's heads. Running on in advance, then, he climbed up a sycamore-tree to get what he wished—never dreaming for a moment that he could engage the attention of One so wonderful. What a surprise, therefore, it must have been to him, to hear himself addressed by name, and to have an intimation given to him to the effect that that very day Jesus meant to be his guest. His response, however, showed how well prepared he was to receive in a suitable way the honour which it was proposed to confer upon him. He joyfully welcomed his unexpected visitor, and to proclaim to the whole world the sincerity of his desire to be reckoned

His disciple, he "stood and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold."

The onlookers were not satisfied with the arrangement which was now made. The genuine conversion of a publican—and of such a publican especially, a man who had made a fortune in his profession—was regarded as too unlikely to be easily credited, and it was sneeringly said, "that He was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner." But Jesus vindicated His act, and put His seal to the reality of the change which had taken place by the proclamation: "This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham."

The whole incident is not only an interesting but an instructive one. It illustrates a fact of which we have many examples: that grace often appears in the most unlooked-for quarters—that Christ knows who are His, and will, sooner or later, single them out—and that the door of mercy will not be shut in the face of any who desire to see Him, to whatever "caste" they belong and whatever has been their history. There is a special significance in the circumstance that Zaccheus was a rich man. Riches constitute no disqualification for discipleship, but if there is any suspicion that wealth has been gotten in doubtful ways it ought to be distributed in some such manner as is indicated here.

2. He met a rich *Pharisee*. We may say that He was brought into contact with more than one. He saw numbers of them one day casting their gifts into the treasury. The young ruler, who came to Him with the question about eternal life, was no doubt also one of the order. And He was occasionally the guest of men whose entertainments showed that they were men of substance. But there was one in particular whose connection with our Lord was of especial interest. This was Joseph of Arimathea. He is expressly spoken of as a rich man. Not much is said about him in the Gospels, but several things are mentioned which deserve notice, as, for example, that he was a good man—that he was one of those who were waiting for the kingdom of God—that he was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly for fear of the Jews—that he was a member of the Sanhedrim—that in that court he gave his vote against the treatment which Jesus received by its hands—and that on the day of the crucifixion he threw off all disguise, went in boldly to Pilate and begged the body of Jesus, and laid it in his own sepulchre wherein no other person had ever before been buried. The whole of Joseph's career cannot be justified, but the service which he rendered to Christ and His cause at its close, so far as we hear of it, will never be forgotten. If he had not interposed the body of the Lord might have been cast, with those of the thieves, into a common trench, and various painful

possibilities might have happened. The intervention of a rich and influential man at the crisis when it came and his possession of a sepulchre, near the cross, and new, were providences so plain and so little to have been expected that they assure of the Divine presence and oversight in connection with all that took place on the occasion.

The wealth of Zaccheus was not employed in any direct way to help Christ in His work. His cause was rather promoted by the sacrifice of it. Here, on the other hand, it was an advantage that a disciple was possessed of riches, for only one who was in his position could have done what he was enabled to accomplish. It is well, then, for the Church to have all classes within its pale, for it is certain that there is special work which each alone can perform.

3. He met a rich *Roman*. We are often reminded in the Gospels that the country was in the hands of a foreign power. Roman soldiers, with their officers, once and again cross our path, and incidents of no little interest occur in which centurions play a part. One of these centurions who commanded the contingent stationed in Capernaum is described as having a servant to whom he was much attached. This servant became seriously ill, and his master who, we may be sure, had tried all ordinary medical remedies in vain, bethought of applying for the supernatural help of Christ. But he had come to form a very exalted conception of

the dignity of the Saviour, while he retained a very humble idea of his own position and claims. Instead, therefore, of applying to Christ directly and in his own person, he begged of the elders of the Church to intercede on his behalf. This they readily undertook to do, and, in carrying out his wish, they incidentally made mention of a circumstance which showed that here was another of the men of the time on whom had been bestowed the privilege of wealth.

“He loveth our nation,” they pled, “and *hath built us a synagogue.*”

It could not have been a poor man who had it in his power to perform an act of such munificence ; and what comes out about his character afterwards leaves us in no doubt about the fact that in him we have another proof that it is possible to have material wealth and yet be rich in faith.

Jesus at once responded to the appeal made to Him by the elders, and He was on His way to the sick bed of the dying servant, but as He approached the house He was met by some friends of the centurion with a singular message. The message was this : “Lord, trouble not Thyself, for I am not worthy that Thou shouldest enter under my roof. Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto Thee. But say in a word and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one Go, and he goeth, and to another Come, and he cometh,

and to my servant Do this, and he doeth it."

Two things were conspicuous in these words. One was the extraordinary humility of the man (showing that riches do not necessarily breed pride) and his faith. Of the latter quality, the Lord took special notice. He even marvelled at it, and said, "I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

As might have been expected, references to the varying conditions of life frequently occur in Christ's discourses. Rich men, for example, are introduced into more than one of His parables.

For one thing, He taught that the rich are not exempt from *trials in their families*. It was a rich man who divided his living between his two sons, and saw one of them immediately start for the far country where he wasted his substance in riotous living. This son was the younger of the two, and probably the best beloved, but the wealth of affection expended upon him could not prevent him from getting tired of his home.

By and by indeed he repented and returned, and was joyfully forgiven, but his restoration did not bring back perfect peace to the household. The jealousy of the elder brother prevented the absolute healing of the breach, and more or less of a cloud would rest upon that family for ever. May we not think of this case as in some respects a typical one? It is not

always an evil to be poor. Inability to go into the far country may haply prevent a journey into it, just as the possession—especially the early possession—of means may lead to visits which would not otherwise be thought of. And in the houses of some of our rich men are skeletons which might not have been there if their children had been compelled to work for their bread.

But again the rich have troubles of their own in connection with *the management of their property*. This is brought out in several of the parables. One man is unfortunate enough to have a steward who is accused of having wasted his goods. Another has occasion to go abroad, and being obliged to leave the conduct of his affairs in the hands of his servants, he discovers on his return that all have by no means been equally faithful. A third meets with a trying disappointment in connection with the display, on his part, of an act of generosity. He has forgiven one of his servants a very large debt on account of the man's being unable to pay, and he afterwards discovers that the debtor he has relieved has been utterly unworthy of the kindness shown to him. These are just the sorts of experiences which men of means are often required to pass through in our own day. At one time they have cause to complain of dishonesty on the part of those they have employed. At another they meet with a want of fidelity to the trust imposed upon them. And at yet

another they have brought under their notice instances of ingratitude which tend to awaken in them a disgust of life. The parables in which those different forms of trial are represented are full of suggestiveness and instruction."

Further, however, the *responsibilities* of rich men are set forth with great impressiveness in two of our Lord's most memorable parables. The story of the man at whose gate Lazarus was laid has, among many others, one lesson on its surface. It is that those who have wherewithal to help the suffering run a serious risk by ignoring them. The means we have will not be ours for ever. They are simply lent us for a day to be used as their real owner wishes, and when the day of reckoning comes our relationship to the poor we have overlooked may be reversed. "Son," Abraham is represented as saying to the rich man in hell—"son, remember that thou in thy lifetime received thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted and thou art tormented." This lesson was taught to another rich man in his lifetime. The close of harvest had come, and he saw with satisfaction his barns filled with plenty and his presses bursting with new wine. The spectacle was exhilarating. "Soul," he said, "take thine ease. Eat, drink, and be merry. For thou hast much goods laid up for thine enjoyment, and so abundant is my wealth that I must pull down my present barns and build larger." But that very night he heard the

voice of doom ; and the very next day saw what he imagined was his property in the hands of another.

Apart from the parables, there are thoughts for the rich scattered through many of Christ's other discourses.

Thus, in one of His great sermons He sets forth the worthlessness of all that the world can give if that is purchased at the cost of spiritual shipwreck. "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

What are the "true riches"? Our Lord tells us at once negatively and positively. Negatively, this is what He says: "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Positively we are assured that those alone can be spoken of as truly rich who have provided themselves with "bags which wax not old and treasure in the heavens which faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth."

We are all slow to believe that wealth is not always desirable. There are few who would be disposed to decline to accept of it if a fortune came in their way. But leaving ourselves out of sight, we are all well enough aware, in a measure, that the possession of riches has its risks. The "deceitfulness of riches" is expressly noted as one of the thorns which tend to choke the growth of the good seed of the Word. "It

is easier," Christ said, "for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." Afterward He seemed to modify that awful statement. "Children," he said, "how hard is it for them that *trust in riches* to enter into the kingdom of God." But even with this modification, His language is serious enough, containing as it does a warning against the common temptation to set too much store on the possession of what the world can bestow. Riches and piety are happily not incompatible, as has often been proved; but the conjunction is uncommon enough to move the many to seek to be content with what they have; the wisest course being that which is presented in the great Teacher's own words:

"Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

CHAPTER IX

THE SICK

HAS not the description given by St. Mark of Christ's progress through the country as a Sick Healer something in it of the swing and rhythm of poetry ?

“ And whithersoever He entered,
Into villages or cities or country,
They laid the sick in the streets,
And besought Him
That they might touch
If it were but the border of His garment :
And as many as touched Him
Were made whole.”

This splendid representation of a beneficent Presence pervading and making itself felt throughout the length and breadth of the land gives one a very vivid impression of the blessedness of the Messiah's ministry.

We have on the record a more or less particular account of a good many of the miracles of mercy which He performed, but that the enumeration is not by any means

complete we are assured in striking terms by St. John.

“There are also,” he says, “many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books which should be written.”

In this language there is a glorious exaggeration which we can very easily forgive. It is that into which a man naturally falls when he cannot find words enough to express adequately the greatness of his thought. And yet St. Mark’s sober account of what actually occurred gives a wonderful measure of countenance to the exaggeration.

For, first of all, he tells us that the benefits which Christ conferred on the sick were not confined to *localities*. They were scattered abroad wherever He went—in cities where suffering is abundant—in villages where those needing help are comparatively few—and in thinly peopled districts where one in trouble is to be found only here and there. In no place were there so many ill that He could not attend to them all, and in none were the cases so few that He did not think it worth His while to spend time upon them.

Then, secondly, there was *no form of disease* with which He found Himself unable to grapple. Those who were laid at His feet are simply described in a summary way as having been “sick,” and (we are told) “He healed them

all." Fever, palsy, dropsy, leprosy were, we know, among the maladies with which He was required to deal, and not one of them ever resisted successfully the touch of His hand. Disease of every sort fled before Him.

Nor must a third feature of the history be overlooked. It is that those who came to Him were not merely made *better*. They were made "*whole*." One striking example of this is given in His treatment of Peter's wife's mother. When He entered her house she was lying ill of fever. We all know how weakening that trouble is and how long the period of convalescence remains after its progress has been arrested. But when Christ laid His hand upon her, not only did the fever go, but she immediately "arose and ministered" to the guests. Her restoration was complete.

Finally, what crowns the story is the fact that all the virtue which is described as "going out of Him" did not, in the least, exhaust the supply, so superabundant was the grace with which He was filled that it overflowed through His very clothing. "As many as touched but the border of His garment" felt at once the thrill of a new life.

We can imagine the sensation which would be created at the present day, in a populous district of our own country, if a world-famed physician were to arrive in it, and were to intimate his readiness to receive and do his best (without fee) to cure all who might choose to

come to him. What a stir such an advertisement would make in all houses in which there were sick-rooms, and what an outburst of activity would be called forth, on the part especially of such as had begun to despair about the recovery of their friends. And if the physician did not disappoint the expectations he had excited—if through his means the blessing of health was really conveyed to many a household—what a boon would his visit be regarded as having been, and what an amount of happiness and thankfulness would he leave behind him !

Yet how imperfectly would an experience of that kind illustrate the results of a visit like that which St. Mark describes as having been paid by Christ to the land of Gennesaret. The moment His arrival came to be known the inhabitants “ran through that whole region round about and began to carry about in beds those that were sick where they knew He was.” Such excitement was there!—such bustle—such hurrying of people toward a common centre ! Along the high-roads—by more private ways—over the open fields—men and women would be seen carrying their afflicted friends to give them a chance of a word from the great Physician. And afterwards, what a sigh of relief would pass over all that region where so many sick-rooms had been emptied, and so many whose cases had appeared to be hopeless were now seen returning in the possession of recovered

health. No wonder that the multitudes who heard of such wonders should have had their enthusiasm awakened, and should have proposed to elevate the performer of them to the position of their king.

Christ's course as a Healer of the Sick can be traced with some measure of distinctness. He was not able to do much for the town in which He had been brought up because of the unbelief which prevailed in it—although even there "He laid His hands on a few sick folk and healed them." But when He went down to Capernaum His action was less restrained. There, after performing several miracles which are expressly described, He is represented as retiring to the house in which He had found a temporary resting-place — apparently for the night. He was not allowed, however, to settle down after His day's labours. The news of what He had done for others had spread throughout the place, and the result was seen in an extraordinary commotion. "At even," we read, "when the sun had set, they brought unto Him all that were diseased and them that were possessed with devils. And all the city was gathered at the door." It was, in fact, very much a rehearsal of what happened afterwards in the land of Gennesaret. That incident occurred in the country ; this took place in a town. But what followed was very much the same. He did not refuse to respond to the appeals made to Him in the one locality because He

was only paying a passing visit to it. Nor did He reply to the demands of the crowd in Capernaum by pleading that the hour was late and unseasonable. In the latter case He at once resumed the work which had been suspended, and that very night "He healed many that were sick of divers diseases and cast out many devils. At the same time this has to be noted, that He did not confine His beneficence to Capernaum. What He did in "His own city" He must have done also in the neighbouring towns lying on the shores of the Lake of Galilee, for the woe which He pronounced afterwards on Capernaum, on account of its impenitency in the face of mighty works performed in it, was extended to Bethsaida and Chorasin which had evidently enjoyed similar advantages.

He did not confine His benefits, however, to these centres of population. "He preached" we are told, "in their synagogues throughout all Galilee and [naming this as a sample of His work] He cast out devils." Of these labours the merest outline is given, but it is easy to imagine how His time was spent in the rural districts of the country when we land with Him on the shores of Gennesaret or follow Him to that mountain where He is described as surrounded by a multitude of "blind and dumb and lame and maimed," all of whom He sent away healed and rejoicing.

Yet it was not in Galilee only that His

restoring power was displayed. As He was passing through Samaria on His way to Jerusalem there met Him ten men who were lepers—one of them, at least, being a Samaritan—and He made them all clean. And what He did in the Holy City itself may be gathered, not only from the cases of which particular records are preserved—such as the cure of the impotent man at the Pool of Bethesda and the opening of the eyes of the blind man who was sent to wash at the pool of Siloam—but from the inadvertent testimony which was borne to Him by His very enemies. “Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees in council and said, ‘What do we? *for this man doeth many miracles.*’” Further, He extended His benefits to other parts of Judea. We know what He did at Jericho to Blind Bartimeus, and St. Matthew tells us that when He came into the coasts of Judea beyond Jordan, “great multitudes followed Him,” and He healed them all there. Nay, He appears to have gone further away than this, for we hear of blessings having been dispensed by Him (1) in that region of Decapolis of which Damascus was one of the cities, (2) in the neighbourhood of Tyre and Sidon where He healed the daughter of the Canaanitish woman, and if we suppose Mount Hermon to have been the Mount of Transfiguration, (3) under the shadow of the Lebanon itself.

Once and again, it would appear as if He

would fain have been left alone, but "He could not be hid," and wherever He went a breath of health and life accompanied Him.

There were many other works which Jesus did of which we have no record, and the question naturally suggests itself: What were the principles which guided the evangelists in selecting for special mention those of which they give an account? The question is one which it is not difficult, so far, to answer.

Some of them were evidently singled out because on the very face of them they indicated the forthputting of a Divine power.

Others are named because they were strikingly fitted to illustrate the nature and working of the process of redemption.

While the detailed narratives of what took place in connection with the miracles performed on the Sabbath were obviously introduced with a view to an exposition of how the day should be regarded and observed.

As to the first of these classes it is easy to see that room might have been given for questioning the miraculous character of the cures which He effected, if their subjects had been persons whose diseases admitted of successful treatment by ordinary physicians or if their recovery, after He had spoken to them or touched them, had been slow and gradual. When He cleansed many lepers, however — although even yet leprosy baffles the most advanced medical skill

—and when His arrest of, for example, fever became so instantaneous and complete, that His patients were restored to health and strength at once, candid onlookers could scarcely refuse to recognise there the presence of the finger of God. This characteristic appeared even more strikingly in connection with those who were under demoniacal possession. He cast out devils with a word—the devils themselves expressly acknowledging His authority—and the quick and perfect restoration to his right mind of the raging maniac whom He met coming from among the tombs proclaimed His supremacy to be absolutely unique and unparalleled.

With regard to the miracles which illustrate the nature of redemption, those will arrest the attention of the most inattentive reader. The cleansing of the leper—the opening of the eyes of the blind—the infusing of new life into the withered hand—the healing of the woman who had spent all her living upon physicians and was none the better—and the emancipation of enslaved men and women from the dominion of the Evil One: those all served the purpose, and are still serving the purpose, of object lessons to teach and enforce the significance of those higher truths which it was His special mission to proclaim. Nor is it to be assumed that the parallels suggested were merely fanciful in their nature. The deliverance of the man with the palsy was declared in the form of announcing to

him the forgiveness of his sins ; and this is but one of many illustrations that could be given of the occult connection between sin and disease.

So far the principles on which the evangelists proceeded in the selection of the miracles they have recorded seem simple enough. They chose those incidents which showed Christ's Divine power, or helped to give vividness to His teaching. But here is a notable fact that no fewer than seven of the miracles made special mention of—and of those some are among the most remarkable He performed—took place on the Sabbath day. For this arrangement there must have been sufficient reasons. What could these be? The answer of some is, that Jesus in what He did meant, if not to abolish, yet greatly relax the law of the Fourth Commandment. But to such a contention there are insuperable objections which do not need to be stated here. The truth unquestionably appears to be this, that what our Lord intended to do in so “profaning the day,” as the Jews asserted, was *first* to baptize the Sabbath with a more humane and loving spirit, and *second* to manifest His own authority and glory. Few words of His indeed are more majestic and full of a great claim than these—“*The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath day.*” That was the voice of a God and not of a man.

These ends we may assume were, in the view of the evangelists, important and significant

enough to justify their giving them special prominences, and hence their repetition of a series of incidents which were open to misinterpretation, but which, when properly understood, were well fitted to show "what manner of Man" He was who took it upon Him in so marked a way to disregard public opinion.

For us, what we are now chiefly called upon to remember when we think of Christ's relation to the sick of his time, is that He warred against all disorder whether in the physical or the spiritual world. Disease is one of the results of the presence in the world of a kingdom of Satan, and His mission was to set up a kingdom of God in which the presence of no evil was to be tolerated. In His view, too—as was evident—the maladies of soul and body are inter-related, and hence in seeking to promote the emancipation of either He aimed at serving the interests of both.

The idea has more or less affected all those parts of the world which have come under the influence of the Christian religion. Heathenism when left to itself has produced no hospitals or infirmaries. But such institutions have sprung up invariably wherever the gospel has been preached with any degree of power. And in recent times the Church has been carrying out still more fully and intelligently the principle underlying the ministry of Christ by sending into the waste places of the earth—both at

home and abroad—not merely ministers to preach but missionaries to heal.

In other words—in our medical missions we have at last risen to a more adequate apprehension of the gospel theory of salvation, which is not merely to seek to carry men safe to heaven when they die, but to endeavour to banish all forms of evil from the world now and so establish even in this life a real Reign of God.

CHAPTER X

THE CHILDREN

WE have cause to be thankful that Christ began His life here by becoming Himself a Child. He might have assumed humanity—"a true body and a reasonable soul"—in other ways, but He elected to enter into the world like ourselves as "made of a woman." And in consenting to the humiliation of "being born" He accepted all the conditions of His lot. When the shepherds came to Bethlehem after the vision they found the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Some weeks after, the Wise Men were introduced to the same Child, and they saw Him resting on His mother's knee, all unconscious of the homage that was being paid to Him. And if it had not been for the precautions taken by Joseph, the massacre of the other innocents might have also cut short the earthly existence of One whose life-work was to be of such supreme importance to us.

As time wore on there did not seem much, to

unobservant eyes, to distinguish Him from other children. Mary indeed pondered in her heart what she had seen and heard in Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and she could not but always remember with awe the language and attitude of Simeon in the temple. But so far as the outside world was concerned the presence of the Messiah in it was so little accounted of that after spending a generation in Nazareth the inhabitants recollected nothing about Him but that He had laboured in the midst of them as a carpenter. And yet this is known: that He was "a holy Child"—that His conduct was in all things so exemplary that it had commended Him to God—that He possessed, also, attractive personal qualities which made Him a favourite with men—and that His intelligence was so marked that the growth of His wisdom was as conspicuous as that of His stature. He was not a prodigy, as Papist traditions make Him out to have been, doing miracles for no end or purpose but to create astonishment. But two things might well have perplexed any who took the trouble to watch Him—one, that He was loyally subject to His parents, the other, as in the case of His appearing in the temple at the age of twelve, that He could act independently of them and engage in work in which they had no part.

However strange this whole history may seem to us, we are certain that His experiences during His thirty years of preparation were not thrown

away, and that, for example, one result was accomplished, viz., that He became then personally better qualified to be "the faithful High Priest" of every one of us, to whatever stage of life we have come—that of childhood, boyhood, youth, or manhood—for He passed through them all.

When we ask in what relation He stood to the children during His public ministry, we find mention made of four occasions on which were revealed what were His thoughts about them.

1. In the first place we read of His being "much displeased" with those who would have kept them at a distance from Him.

The incident in connection with which He expressed Himself so strongly is at once graphically and touchingly described in a poetical piece which has been often quoted, but which we cannot do better than reproduce here. It is styled—

CHRIST AND THE LITTLE ONES.¹

"The Master has come over Jordan,"
Said Hannah the mother one day,
"He is healing the people who throng Him
With a touch of His finger, they say.

"And now I shall carry the children,
Little Rachel and Samuel and John ;
I shall carry the baby Esther
For the Lord to look upon."

¹ By Julia Gill.

The father looked at her kindly,
But he shook his head and smiled,
“Now who but a doating mother
Would think of a thing so wild?

“If the children were tortured with demons
Or dying of fever—’twere well,
Or had they the taint of the leper
Like many in Israel——”

“Nay, do not hinder me, Nathan,
I feel such a burden of care,
If I carry it to the Master
Perhaps I shall leave it there.

“If He lay His hand on the children,
My heart will be lighter, I know,
For a blessing for ever and ever
Will follow them as they go.”

So, over the hills of Judah,
Along by the vine-rows green,
With Esther asleep on her bosom
And Rachel her brothers between,

’Mong the people who hung on His teaching,
Or waited His touch or His word,
Through the row of proud Pharisees listening,
She pressed to the feet of the Lord.

“Now, why shouldst thou hinder the Master,”
Said Peter, “with children like these?
Seest not how from morning till evening
He teacheth and healeth disease?”

Then Christ said : “Forbid not the children,
Permit them to come unto Me,”
And He took in His arms little Esther,
And Rachel He set on His knee.

And the heavy heart of the mother
Was lifted all earth care above,
As He laid His hands on the brothers,
And blest them with tenderest love,

As He said of the babes in His bosom,
 "Of such is the kingdom of heaven."
 And strength for all duty and trial
 That hour to her spirit was given.

"A lady missionary in the East tells that one day a woman came to her with a baby, whom she had found in a ditch. The poor child had been cast out by its own father—as thousands of others have been in heathen countries—because it was 'only a girl.' In begging the lady to take charge of the very unattractive object that was presented to her (it was naked and covered with mud) the woman said, 'Please do take this little thing; your God is the only God that teaches to be good to little children.'"¹

It is true; the God of the Bible alone presents Himself under a beneficent aspect toward all who from their helplessness are exposed to be despised, and among all the sayings of Jesus Christ there is, perhaps, none which has gone to the hearts of so many as His "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not to come unto Me"—this taken in connection with what follows: "He took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them." Peter spoke what sounded like reason and common sense when he interfered in the interest of what undoubtedly looked like more important work—that of teaching the people and healing their diseases. But while, if Christ had continued to do what His disciples thought most necessary

¹ "The Church Standing of the Children."

benefits would have been conferred which would have been only transient in their effects—by following the course which He chose rather to adopt, an object lesson was given which has told upon all time. How much the incident has endeared Him to His friends we shall never know, but we can see in the absorbing interest which has ever since been taken in the young that the more direct consequences have been incalculable.

2. What He meant when He said of the children, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," may be gathered from another incident in His history. One day His disciples came to Him with a question: "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And this question He answered in a memorable way. He "called a little child unto Him and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

The qualities which He here commends are evidently humility, simplicity, teachableness, openness to receive impressions. These are what men want in an unconverted state, and no one will ever be in a condition to enjoy the society of heaven until he has received the new nature of which these are the characteristics.

But there is abundant warrant for saying that

under that thought which lies on the surface, there is another which we may regard as being assumed, viz., that little children will be found in heaven, and will be, so to speak, more at home there than grown-up men! However certain it is that "believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory," it is not reasonable to suppose that all will begin the new life above under absolutely the same conditions. Enoch, who walked all his days with God, would not enter heaven on the same level personally as the thief who died on the cross. And between an old man who has repented after a career of sin, and a little child who has in a great measure retained its innocence, there must be, to begin with, a great and conscious difference. Not that there is any difference in respect of merit. If any are saved, it will be by grace. But it cannot but be a burden to carry away the memory of a life of sin, and hence we can in one way enter into and appreciate the proverb: "Whom the gods love, die young."

In any case this is a position which no one will question, that little children will be found in heaven, and that is a fact which very many will recognise as having much to do with the question of their Church standing in the earth. The theory that the Church here consists only of those who profess their faith in Christ is not one which counts very well with the history of God's dealings with the world. It is certain

that both in the Patriarchal and the Jewish dispensations the children were formally taken account of, and received an ordinance which put, so to speak, a distinct ecclesiastical stamp upon them. Something specific, therefore, should be indicated, pointing to a complete change in the constitution of the Church, if it is really true that under the Christian dispensation no place in it is now to be assigned to the little ones. We know what the argument is on the other side. It is said that the Church, established by Christ, is a more spiritual body than that which existed under the Old Testament, and that hence only those who are consciously spiritual ought to be accepted as members of it. But has any man, or any body of men, the capacity to say for certain where real spirituality exists? None we know. Admission to membership proceeds simply upon appearances—that is, on the assumption, in the case of grown-up people, that the profession which they make is credible. It may turn out, afterwards, that that profession was false or mistaken, but we do not know that it is the custom, in any community, to baptize again and again until the reality has been reached. Everything turns, then, on the presumption that under certain circumstances a particular person is in the kingdom, and the recognition ordinance is administered to them accordingly.

But is there no presumption of a similar kind in the case of a certain class of infants? What is the meaning of the language which St. Paul

uses when speaking of a marriage between a heathen and a Christian? "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; *else were the children unclean, but now are they holy.*" "Now are they holy!" "What can that possibly signify? ¹ The epithet cannot describe the personal condition of the children—their inherent moral state. The word 'holy' must, have a ceremonial significance; and only one rational interpretation seems admissible, viz., that now, as formerly, the family, as such, has a Church standing—that professing believers, with their children, form the separated or consecrated corporation which we call the visible Church; and that hence it is in entirest harmony with the genius of the religion of the Bible to administer baptism to such children on the presumption that they are already the subjects of Divine grace."

But it is argued there is no certainty that the children will fulfil the promise of their birth. And neither, we answer, is there any certainty that the adult who is baptized shall maintain the promise of his profession. There are hypocrites and self-deceivers in all the strictest communities in the world. What we must be content to proceed upon is a credible presumption, and it is a warrantable faith which sees so much of hopefulness in the position of the children of

¹ "The Church Standing of the Children."

believers as to think them worthy of formal recognition as members of the Church visible.

“We rejoice to think of children being in heaven. We know that numbers of them are in the invisible Church on earth. And it sounds like bathos to be told that no place can be found for them in that outward organisation which once included Simon Magus and Ananias and Sapphira. I confess I have no such high opinion of any visible Church, of any congregation of professing Christians, of any company of good men or women, as to think any one of them as lowered in position or degraded in character by recognising the children of professing Christians as belonging to their fellowship.”¹ Christ took the little children up into His arms, and the visible Church, as such, may, without any loss of dignity, do the same, especially when He was “much displeased” with those who would have forbidden them to come to Him, and added the ever-memorable words, “*Of such is the kingdom of heaven.*”

3. It is a very notable circumstance that our Lord, after drawing the special lesson we have been noticing from the little child whom He had set down in the midst of His disciples, continued to linger on the subject as if His very heart went out to the little ones. “Whosoever,” He said, “shall receive one such little child in My name receiveth Me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in Me, it were

¹ “The Church Standing of the Children.”

better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. . . . Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones ; for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven."

The impression conveyed by these words is that the speaker was aware of a condition of things under which the children ran a risk of ill-treatment. Why did He speak so strongly of the sin and danger of despising the little ones if He saw no disposition in those around Him to be guilty of that offence? We have no such acquaintance with the country or the times to be able to guess at an explanation. But we may connect the warning He gives as to placing a stumbling-block in the way of the children—or "offending them"—with the stern condemnation which He passed on those who tried to keep them from coming to Him, and from the two together we may gather how strong was His desire to have the little ones regarded with hopefulness and interest by His Church. "Whatever you do," He seems to say to His disciples, "beware how you do anything to keep the children from being brought into contact with Me!" He, in fact, identifies Himself with them, declaring that to receive any one of them in His name would be accounted as something done to Himself.

What emphatic testimony does all this bear to the Christian character of those acts which

have established refuges for orphans, or, as in India and Armenia, have taken charge of the children who have been left destitute by famine or oppression. "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

But in enforcing the lesson of being mindful of the children, a consideration is presented here which sounds almost startling: "Take heed that ye do not despise them—for in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven." The idea suggested here is that the children are under the oversight of guardian angels, whose business it is to look continually after their interests. What interpretation, exactly, we are to put upon this it is impossible to say with certainty. We can have no doubt that angels are employed to minister to them which are heirs of salvation, and hence the general conclusion may be admitted that there are such beings as "guardian angels." But we do not know how far the service is distributed, or to what extent it is true that particular angels have the charge of particular persons. The great thought underlying the language of Christ, however, is not difficult to recognise. It is that there is awful risk run by any one who fails to do justice to the children, because the wrong will be immediately brought under the notice of God. Their representatives—those who care for them—live in heaven, and

occupy a position so confidential that, like a friend who has the freest access to the cabinet of a king, they are always so near the Judge of All that they can, at any moment, submit their complaint to Him, and pray for His intervention. These angels serve the purpose of ambassadors, who are always on the watch to see that no injury is done to the countries they represent.

4. Once more, there is yet another occasion on which our attention is specially called to the children. When Christ made His triumphant entry into Jerusalem His presence was welcomed not merely by the miscellaneous crowd of persons who cut down the branches of palm-trees and strewed their garments in the way. The children took up the current cry, and made the temple courts resound with—"Hosanna to the Son of David!" It is possible that many of them did not understand very clearly the significance of the words. They had simply caught the infection of the prevalent enthusiasm. But the cry was distasteful to the Chief Priests and Scribes, and they asked Jesus to interpose for its suppression. But He refused to interfere, quoting, in justification of His refusal, a saying in which, at the time, there was a peculiar significance: "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise." It is not always the fact that the truth which it is most necessary to proclaim is the possession of the old men or even the learned men of a period. The light may rather belong to its youth, and it

may be their special privilege to diffuse it. That was, anyhow, the case now. While the recognised leaders of thought in Judea were shutting their ears and hearts against Him who had come to speak to them from heaven, the children whom they would have silenced were hailing with shouts of exultation the advent of the King who was to re-establish on a better basis the authority of David.

CHAPTER XI

INQUIRERS

CLAIMING as He did to be a Teacher sent from God who had come to give new light on matters of deepest interest to men, it was natural that questions should have been put to Christ from time to time asking for His opinion on particular subjects. Such questions were sometimes put in all earnestness and sincerity, and these were answered in a similar spirit ; but in some the motive was not so good, and the replies given to them, while meeting the difficulties propounded, were of a kind to make those who wished to "entangle Him in His talk" more careful about approaching Him again.

One of the earliest to appear before Him as an inquirer was Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. It was on the occasion of His first Passover, when He was less known than He came to be afterwards. The fame, however, which He had gained in Galilee had followed Him to Jerusalem, where He had also performed some miracles,

and the authorities had begun to look at Him with considerable doubt and suspicion. But the thoughtful man could not help being drawn to this new Teacher. It seemed to him clear that whatever He was He could not be an impostor. No man, he reasoned, could do the miracles which He was doing unless God were with Him, and having a special interest in one particular subject—that of the re-establishment of the theocracy—he resolved to seek a personal interview in order to hear His private opinion on that subject. That he came by night is not surprising. He did not yet know who Jesus was. It was, in a manner, only a speculative interest which he felt in Him, and he could hardly be expected to risk his reputation by paying Him at this early stage a public visit.

What led him immediately to seek the interview was the circumstance that, as he came to know, the constant theme of Christ's preaching was "the kingdom of God." It was his own theme, and he could not resist the impulse to go and hear what so remarkable a Preacher had to say upon that subject. But he was far from getting what he expected—an impersonal talk on his favourite topic. He was surprised to find, in fact, not a philosopher or a theologian, but a Messenger from God ; and, not perhaps to his ultimate disappointment but certainly to his present astonishment, the interview became at once personal and practical. One curious thing must have struck Nicodemus at the outset.

He did not need to propound the question which was in his mind. Jesus knew before He spoke of it what it was that he came to discuss, and the subject of "the kingdom" was introduced at once. But it was introduced in a way which gave, for Nicodemus, an entirely unlooked-for turn to the conference which he had sought. He was summarily told that he needed to be "born again" before he could hope to be able even to understand the nature of that Divine kingdom which was about to be established; and hence, what he had looked forward to as a possibly learned talk about the principles of the theocracy, came to be a close and searching conversation about the nature and method of regeneration.

Another striking inquiry was made later on by a very different kind of person. John the Baptist, Christ's forerunner—through whom, in fact, He had been first introduced to the people—is recorded to have sent to Jesus two of his disciples with this extraordinary message: "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" This message has been explained in various ways. Many think that it was sent not at all for the satisfaction of John, who could never conceivably have doubted, but for the instruction of his disciples or of those in whose hearing the answer to them would be given. But to this view there is a fatal objection. It would make Christ Himself a party to the

deception ; for the reply which He gave was addressed to *John*, and He knew how superfluous it must have been to say anything for his enlightenment if it was only about His disciples that He was feeling any anxiety.

But is it not strange to think of such a question being put by the man who, pointing to Jesus as He walked, said, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world"? Yes, it is strange, but not, alas ! at all incomprehensible. John, it will be remembered, was at the time in prison—and we know what dreadful places those were to which prisoners in that age were often consigned. The hardships he was enduring, therefore, may have told on his health and spirits—and as he saw no steps being taken for his deliverance by One whose miracles showed Him to be the possessor of supernatural power, or any material progress being made toward the establishment of that Reign of God whose immediate coming he had been himself commissioned to proclaim ; the iron, it is possible entered into his soul, and awful doubts arose as to whether he had not been living all along under an illusion. The message, then, expresses on the part of the Baptist a genuine anxiety, and it is touching to notice that Christ, in His reply, uttered no words of complaint or condemnation, and even followed up that reply by a glowing panegyric on the very man who had appeared for a moment to doubt about Him.

The answer itself was conclusive. "Go," He

said to the two disciples, "and show John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them."

Those marks of His Messiahship were sufficient, and no doubt were felt to be sufficient by him who, for a moment, had seemed to waver in his allegiance.

Twice over a question of transcendent interest was addressed to Christ—once by a lawyer, whose object was to "tempt" the great Teacher to say something of which he could lay hold, and another by a young ruler whose anxiety on the subject dealt with appears to have been genuine. The question was, "What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?"

What particular answer the lawyer expected can only be conjectured, but it is probable that he hoped for something that could be shown to be in conflict with the current teaching of the Scribes. The Lord, however, did not fall into the snare which was set for Him. He answered the question by putting another. "What is written in the Law?" He asked. "How readest thou?" The reply was a perfectly fair one in the circumstances. It implies an appeal to their common standard and the Scriptures. And the lawyer responded to the appeal, and that in a manner with which no one could find fault.

He saw no risk in giving a summary of the commandments, which indicated that they were exceeding broad. "He answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself."

No doubt He gave the definition with an air of perfect self-complacency. He had often used the same language before, and took credit to himself for having his answer so ready. But he was immediately made to see that he had given himself away. Jesus said unto him, "Thou hast answered right: this do and thou shalt live." It is impossible not to admire the skill and appositeness of that reply. Christ is not answering here the general question of what a sinner must do in order to inherit eternal life. If that had been His object He would have spoken differently. He is dealing with an impertinent and self-righteous lawyer, who is trying to entangle Him in His talk, and taking him on his own ground. He returns to the terms of the old covenant, and preaches to him that way of salvation which is still open to all who can pursue it. "Do this—love God supremely and thy neighbour as thyself—and thou shalt certainly inherit eternal life."

The confusion of the lawyer on having his attack met in this way must have been obvious to the very bystanders; and some of them may have smiled when, to cover his discomfiture, he

put the irrelevant and incoherent question, "And who is my neighbour?" In answer Christ told the memorable story of the man who fell among thieves on his way to Jericho, and was rescued by a Samaritan; and from it the lawyer learnt something of the meaning of a true neighbourliness. But in the diversion thus caused, his original inquiry was lost sight of, and the conversation must have ended with the decided feeling on his part that he had made nothing by his "temptation."

The young ruler was animated by a better spirit. In asking the same question, he approached Christ respectfully, kneeling down to Him and addressing Him as "Good Master"; and he showed his earnestness by running up to Him when He appeared. But to begin with, the same reply was given: "Thou knowest the commandments"; and five of those which form the second table of the law were repeated. That reply, however, did not silence the new inquirer. The conscience of the lawyer told him that he had not come up to the standard which he had himself given, and he felt that he had nothing more to say. But the young ruler was not so easily abashed. He was not conscious of having come at all short of the requirements that had been named. "All these commandments," he said, "have I kept from my youth up"—and what can I do more to inherit eternal life? It was not a vain boast which the young man made. He had been

living all his days an outwardly blameless life, and for his innocence and ingenuousness the Lord loved him. But there was one heart-sin of which he was not sensible—the sin of loving the world too much—and to make him realise its power and danger, Christ required of him an extraordinary sacrifice. “When Jesus heard these things He said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing : sell all thou hast and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven ; and come, follow Me.”

He was not able to stand this test. He was rich, and the demand made upon him implied the surrender of great possessions. And there seemed nothing for it but to abandon the quest for eternal life in the interest of what he enjoyed in the world. But although he went away at this time he did so sorrowfully, and the hope has not unreasonably been cherished that better thoughts came to him afterwards, and that he returned to Christ and became one of His devoted followers.

In the course of the conversation which took place between Jesus and the woman of Samaria, a question came to be submitted to Him which for her involved a matter of the deepest import. She had come to the well with no serious thought about anything. She was living a sinful life, but her conscience was not burdened in consequence, and such religious speculations as she had listened to had been allowed to sweep

lightly over the surface of her mind. But as she talked with Christ her views began to deepen and expand, and, to her own surprise probably, she found herself inquiring as to the best refuge to which sinners might betake themselves.

“Sir,” said she, when her sin had found her out, “I perceive that thou art a Prophet.” Tell me, then, in what direction I should turn. “Our fathers worshipped in the mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”

As we read these words we think of a vessel caught in a storm, whose master is at once moved to ask to what place of shelter it would be best to run. He knows of one that is near, but he is doubtful about the measure of security it can promise, and his thoughts pass on to another which is more distant, but in which he is more certain of being safe. The question of their comparative values had never been before him at any former time, but now he is driven to consider their respective claims by stress of weather. In like manner this woman, when she had had her sin brought home to her, is constrained to deal in earnest with a subject in which she had taken no previous interest—that of the refuge to which, under a sense of danger, it would be safest to betake herself. That which was nearest was the temple on Mount Gerizzim, which was built by Sanballat, and of which the Apostate Jew, Manasseh, was the first high priest. But the efficacy of the sacri-

fices offered there was doubted in some quarters—and she would hear from this “Prophet” if it might be better to look to Jerusalem. His reply led her to turn her face in quite a new direction. “Woman,” said he, “believe Me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father. . . . God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” The effect of these words was remarkable. It was to make her think of the higher revelation, which it would seem she and others were confidently expecting. “I know,” she said, “that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when He is come, He will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am HE.” Then, indeed, the harbour was reached. The woman, forgetting altogether the purpose for which she had come, left her waterpot behind her, and rushing back into the city, cried: “Come, see a man that told me all things that ever I did. Is not this the Christ?” The lesson she thus learnt and taught was this—that the only refuge in which a sinner can be assured of complete protection is that provided by the Messiah.

Once, when Jesus was walking in what seemed a leisurely and disengaged manner in Solomon’s Porch, the Jews came round about Him—“*like bees*,” as the Psalmist puts it—and said, in a threatening way, “How long dost Thou make

us to doubt? If Thou be the Christ, tell us plainly."

It was a pointed challenge—amounting, in fact, to this—that for the prevailing unbelief about Him He Himself was alone to blame. The evidences He had supplied were utterly insufficient, and if He wanted to be acknowledged as the Messiah it would be necessary to be more explicit.

The charge was a serious one, because it implied that there had been an inexcusable reserve in His teaching, resulting necessarily in grievous injury to the world.

But what was His answer? It was twofold. First, He reminded His accusers of the proofs which He had actually given of His Divine mission, and secondly He explained to them what was the true secret of their unbelief.

1. His positive evidences were of two kinds—His word, and His works. "I *told* you," He said, "and ye believed not," and "the works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me." In neither was there any deficiency. If they had candidly listened to His teaching (He affirmed) they would not have questioned its inspiration, and if they had taken note of His miracles, they would have come to the conclusion at which Nicodemus arrived—that no one could have done what He did if God had not been with Him.

2. But the truth was that their unbelief was due to another cause altogether. "Ye believe

not, *because ye are not of My sheep.* My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." This was not what they would recognise as for themselves a satisfying answer, because it implied that they were incapable of understanding Him. But the answer was very much the same as that which was given to Nicodemus, viz., that to "see," in a spiritual sense, "the kingdom," it is necessary to be endowed with spiritual faculties. These faculties are the possession only of those who are born again, and the unbelief therefore of merely intellectual inquirers can be easily accounted for. This is a high position to take up, and one which no merely human teacher could presume to occupy; but it is a perfectly intelligible position, and in its light we can understand how it so often happens that what is hidden from the wise and prudent is revealed unto babes. Christianity has much to say for itself on the ground of its essential reasonableness, but it depends for its success not on "the enticing words of men's wisdom," but on "the demonstration of the Spirit and the power of God." A faith which is merely the result of argument or persuasion cannot be trusted to be permanent, because the dialectic skill which has produced it may be overcome by the wit of another whose gifts are greater. That faith alone may be relied on to remain which "stands not in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

The three sects of the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Herodians, each tried their best to entangle Jesus in His talk.

1. The first of the three held that there is no resurrection, neither angels nor spirits; and they one day submitted a case which, in their opinion, showed the theory of another life to be absurd. A certain man, they said, married a wife by whom he had no children, but by the law his brother was bound to take the widow with the view of raising up seed for the dead, and he did so. There were no children, however, by this second marriage, nor from the five which followed, for in this family there were no fewer than seven brothers. Last of all the woman died also—and (they asked) “whose wife shall she be in the other world, for they all had her?” We can imagine them pausing after putting the question, with a triumphant smile on their faces, as having placed a problem before Him to which a satisfactory answer was impossible. It was a silly question which they put, and Christ might have refused to take the trouble of answering it. But His replies to all such inquiries addressed to Him were directed to do far more than meet the immediate difficulties He was called on to solve; and here, in His answer, He not only gave what was sufficient to silence the Sadducees, but indicated a principle which has been of service in a far wider connection. First dealing with the case submitted to Him, He said, “Ye do err, not

knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." But, having the subject of the resurrection before Him, He takes the opportunity of proclaiming His dissent from the Sadducees, and of stating one conclusive reason why they could be proved to be in the wrong. "As touching the resurrection of the dead," He said, "have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God?—I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." These men, then, served a good purpose in calling forth from the great Teacher not only an emphatic testimony to the fact of another state of existence, but in contributing an argument which has been found of the greatest use ever since in confirming our faith in the fact.

2. The Herodians went more cunningly to work. They also had a difficulty, but it was one with which it was very much less easy to deal. As patriots they objected to the will of the Romans, and although they paid their taxes under protest, they knew that the popularity of any teacher would be seriously shaken with the multitudes if He taught, in so many words, that it was the duty of all to pay the taxes. On the other hand, to call in question that duty in public and in a formal way, was a perilous thing to do, for the Roman authorities were jealous and not at all disposed to wink at insubordina-

tion or rebellion. It was, then, a very subtle question which was put by the representatives of this sect to Christ. It seemed to place Him inevitably between the horns of a dilemma. If He said "Yes," He offended the Jews; if He said "No," He offended the Romans. The manner in which He extricated Himself from this position explains clearly enough why His enemies afterwards became chary of putting any more questions to Him.

"Master," said the tempters, "we know that Thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest Thou for any man: for Thou regardest not the person of men"—a most insidious introduction, which was obviously intended, with its complimentary references to His independence, to throw Him off His guard—"Tell us, therefore, What thinkest Thou? Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar or not?"

"But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye Me, ye hypocrites? Show Me the tribute money. And they brought unto Him a penny. And He saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto Him, Cæsar's. Then saith He unto them, Render, therefore, unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's."

The story goes on to say, "When they had heard these words they marvelled, and left Him, and went their way."

It is a conclusion which we might have

expected. They had gained nothing by their little plot. They had not succeeded in compromising Him in the least. All that they had got was the enunciation of a working principle which met the existing situation, and which has helped to guide men in circumstances of perplexity ever since. Cæsar has his rights, and they must not be ignored under the pretence that they conflict with the claims of God ; and on the other, God has His rights which Cæsar can never have any title to interfere with or destroy.

3. What plan the Pharisees followed to bring Jesus into discredit is characteristic of the sect. There was in it that element of cruelty and hypocrisy which makes them in the history so little attractive. It was not an abstract question that they put. They brought in a victim to sacrifice on the altar of their enmity.

“The Scribes and Pharisees brought unto Him a woman taken in adultery, and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto Him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned ; but what sayest Thou? This they said, tempting, that they might have to accuse Him.”

It was a clumsy device this, for Jesus might have replied as He did to the man who asked Him to interfere in the disposition of an estate, “Who made Me a judge over you?” But it may be said that He was shocked at the malig-

nity displayed in connection with the appeal, and He desired to make their discomfiture more complete and conspicuous. At first, therefore, He appeared to pay no heed to the question which was put to Him, stooping down and writing with His finger on the ground. But this was regarded by the men as a sign that He was unable to reply to them, and they "continued asking Him," expecting, no doubt, to be able to turn round upon the onlookers and point Him out as one whose mouth had been effectually closed.

At last, however, "He lifted up Himself, and said unto them, *He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.* And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground."

The effect of this word was extraordinary. "They which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest even unto the last, and Jesus was left alone and the woman standing in the midst."

What a humiliating spectacle! The very men who, in their consuming zeal for purity, were prepared to put a woman who had sinned to a cruel death, are seen slipping out of sight, and thus virtually confessing that they themselves had been guilty of a similar offence! Could anything prove more conclusively that they were unfit to be the religious leaders of the period, or make it more manifest that the times themselves were out of joint? To say that they gained nothing by this assault on

Christ is to say little. They came out of the conflict so beaten, so disgraced, that it seems wonderful how they could have so far regained the confidence of the people as to move them to demand the crucifixion.

On the other hand, how exquisitely beautiful is the ending of the incident so far as Jesus Himself was concerned. "When Jesus had lifted up Himself and saw none but the woman He said unto her, Where are those thine accusers? Hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee. Go, and sin no more."

"The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." Sinful men, though conscious of their own impurity, would have stoned one like themselves; He who was without sin regarded her with infinite compassion, and sent her away to begin, we may be sure, a better life. Who does not sympathise with David in his perplexity when he was left to choose one of three evils, and when he said, "Let me fall now into the hand of the Lord, for very great are His mercies, but let me not fall into the hand of men"?

For a question which was put to Jesus by the chief priests and elders of the people there was more justification. He had undoubtedly taken a great deal upon Him, denouncing, for example, in unsparing terms, men holding high positions in the community, and even driving in an im-

perious way out of the temple parties of whose presence there He did not approve. It was perhaps natural that He should have been, in those circumstances, officially asked, "By whose authority doest Thou these things, and who gave Thee this authority?"

Now that question, one might think, could have been answered in a very simple way. He derived His commission from God, and He might at once have said so. But that would not have satisfied His interrogators. They would have proceeded to inquire what evidence He could give to prove that God had really sent Him ; and the conference might have ended in nothing better than a profitless wrangle. The answer which He actually gave was inspired by that wisdom which distinguished all His replies.

"Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing which if ye tell me I in likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying: If we shall say, From heaven, He will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men, we fear the people, for all hold John as a prophet."

He had, in short, placed them in a dilemma. They could not answer His question in one way or another ; and they were obliged to confess their inability. "We cannot tell," they said.

“Neither, then,” said Jesus, “tell I you by what authority I do these things.”

Let us not imagine, however, that in dealing with their interrogation in this way, Jesus was seeking merely to evade it. There is a much deeper significance than that in His reply. The truth is that He was suggesting to them the method by which they could themselves answer their own question. John’s claim to be regarded as a prophet was vindicated by his teaching. He did not need to say by what authority he taught. His words spoke for him. And Jesus virtually intimated to those who questioned Him that He Himself wished to be tested in a similar way. “He that rejecteth Me and receiveth not My words, the word that I have spoken, the same will judge him at the last day.” “If I do not the works of My Father believe Me not; but if I do, though ye believe not Me, believe the works.” Jesus did not need to say in so many words by whose authority He acted. His whole life was proclaiming the fact, and the demand made upon Him was equivalent to that which He had encountered in Solomon’s Porch, “How long dost Thou make us to doubt if Thou be the Christ? tell us plainly.” Now, as then, He might have said, “Ye do not believe because ye are not of My sheep.”

Yet another class of questions remains to be noticed before this chapter is closed. They deal with subjects in regard to which Christ

refused to give any such answer as was expected.

1. Once when He was engaged in one of His evangelistic journeyings, teaching continually in the cities and villages of Galilee, it occurred to one of the disciples to wonder whether the results from such labours were likely to be very great, and He asked, "Are there few that be saved?" It is a question which has been often put since and which is constantly passing through the minds of many, although they refrain from expressing it in words. But no definite answer has ever been given to it, and the light in which it should be viewed is plainly suggested by the reply which Christ Himself gave.

"Strive," said He, "to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

What He meant was evidently this—that any such inquiries are idle. Our main anxiety ought to be about our own salvation; and if that is secured we may safely leave to God the settlement of the question of how many He will gather into heaven at last.

2. A similar answer to this was given to the disciples when, after He had announced to them the approaching destruction of the temple, they expressed a desire to know when that destruction was to take place. "Tell us," they said, "when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the world?"

The latter part of their inquiry was so far noticed because it was of practical importance that they should be prepared for the anxious times that were drawing near. But about the time He gave no specific information. All that it was needful for them to think of was the question of how it could be best met. And so, instead of telling them when the catastrophe He had predicted would take place, He said, "Take heed that no man deceive you, for many will come in My name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many."

3. The principles, if we may so speak, on which He proceeded in connection with questions of all unseasonable description, was indicated still more pointedly when, after the resurrection, His disciples asked Him plainly, "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" To that question He might have given an explanatory answer—an answer fitted to enlighten them as to the true nature of the kingdom He had come to set up. But He absolutely refrained from entering on that subject, and contented Himself with rebuking them for their uncalled-for curiosity.

"It is not for you," He said, "to know the time or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power."

At the same time He directs them to think of their immediate duty, and promises that if they tarry at Jerusalem they will receive power from the Holy Ghost which will qualify them

to be witnesses to the uttermost parts of the earth.

If we had nothing but these questions and the answers which He gave to them to guide us in forming a conception of the character of Christ, how wonderful would He seem to us! He is never found unready—He always shows a perfect comprehension of the significance of the inquiries put to Him and of the motives by which His interrogators were influenced—and His replies are always so wise and suggestive and far-seeing that they have conveyed lessons by which the world has profited ever since. Certainly it may be said, in more senses than one, “Never man spake like that Man.”

CHAPTER XII

SIN

WHAT is sin?

Few better answers have been given to the question than that which we find in the Shorter Catechism.

“Sin,” it is there said, “is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.”

The law is there regarded as a straight line, and those are held to be guilty of “sin,” who either come short of the line or who transgress it, that is, who either fail to fulfil the requirements of the law or who do what it has forbidden.

Of the law itself we have a summary in the Ten Commandments, but our Lord has set it before us in a simpler form.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.”

And “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

The language which He thus uses is very

suggestive. It teaches, in the first place, that the law is very comprehensive, taking account of all our relations both to God and man (for love will never allow any ill to be worked to either); and, in the second place, it has a regard not merely to our outward actions, but to the spirit in which we perform them.

Now when Christ came into the world He found ideas prevailing in it which were entirely subversive of these principles, and in dealing with the sin which He saw surrounded Him, one of the first things He had to set Himself to do was to combat the current ideas and to explain the nature of a true morality.

For the prevalence of the errors which were abroad those who were chiefly responsible were the Scribes and Pharisees. They were the religious teachers of the day, and because of the high place which they held in the public esteem their mischievous influence upon the age which they dominated was exceedingly great. Hence the controversial form which Christ's teaching took and the severity of the language which He employed when speaking of their proceedings.

What He accused the Pharisees of was the following: *first*, that they had lowered the standard of morality, making the law satisfied with less than a complete conformity with its requirements; *second*, that they represented righteousness as consisting in a merely external obedience to the commandments; and *third*,

that acceptable obedience could be inspired by motives very much lower than that of love.

An illustration of the nature of the first of these charges is given in the story of the two men who went up together into the temple to pray. One of them, it is said, stood and prayed thus with himself: "God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, and give tithes of all that I possess." There is nothing said in the parable that would compel us to conclude that the man pretended to a character which he did not possess. He was, probably enough, entitled to all the credit to which he laid claim. But, after all, what did it amount to? It was simply that he had been attending with, it may be, unusual diligence, to the routine duties of an ordinary member of the Church, and had been avoiding some of the open vices which society itself condemns. This was the righteousness in which he boasted. There was certainly nothing very remarkable in it, and in its light we can see the force of our Lord's saying: "Except your righteousness shall *exceed* the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

The second charge which Jesus brings against the Pharisees is that they were foolish enough to believe that they were really keeping the law when they were simply obeying it in the letter. They were among the number of those to whom

the Sermon on the Mount may be said to refer. They read the commandments, "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not commit adultery," and they were content when they could say that they had not committed either offence. But the law, as Christ interpreted it, had a wider sweep than they imagined: "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment," "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after hath committed adultery with her in his heart."

As to the spring or motive of their righteousness, it was something very different from that which God demanded. When a Pharisee gave alms, it was not from love either to God or to the poor. It was to win applause from men, as was evident from the fact that when he resolved to go forth on a charitable enterprise he sounded a trumpet before him, that all the world might take notice of his generosity. So with his prayers. He did not retire to his closet to commune with God in secret, but stood conspicuous in the synagogues, or even at the corners of the streets.

What a caricature, then, was all this of a holy life! It was a life with very little service in it—at the best a life without any soul or heart, a life inspired by the meanest of motives. And yet this was the example which the common people had set before them, and which they were taught to regard as the highest outcome of religion.

The mischievous influence of it all can be easily imagined, and how strongly what He saw was condemned by Christ may be gathered from the language which He used in denouncing it. There were many other kinds of sinners in the land besides the Pharisees, but *they* awakened His strongest indignation. Not only did He speak of the order with great severity, but only on their heads and on the cities which rejected Him were pronounced those terrible "woes" of which we read.

One consequence of the teaching of the Pharisees was that it tended to defeat the very purpose of Christ's mission, by rendering the people incapable of appreciating it. He came to proclaim the mercy of God—to preach the doctrine of *grace*. But of what interest was all that to those who were not conscious of being in need of mercy, who rather believed that they were entitled to reward, and who were doing their best to propagate the belief that men are not utterly lost, and have no need of a supernaturally provided salvation?

Nothing could be worse than the effect of these ideas upon the teachers themselves. In the first place, they inevitably made them hypocrites. They knew in their hearts that the world was thinking better of them than they deserved, and they could hope to maintain their position only by pretending to be what they were not. Nor did the evil stop there—a second result followed: their hypocrisy issued in their utter

demoralisation. We may sometimes have wondered at the descriptions given of the personal wickedness of many of the men who held high positions in the Jewish Church—how, for example, they were “devourers of widows’ houses,” and how, as is suggested by the story of the woman taken in adultery, they were living impure lives in secret. But it is not difficult to understand the process by which they became what they were. When a man poses as being more than ordinarily religious without having really undergone a radical change of heart, the unrenewed nature will be sure, by and by, to assert itself. This cannot, of course, be allowed to take place outwardly, for the sake of appearances. And so there comes to be created a character which may be likened to a whitened sepulchre, which is beautiful without but which is inwardly full of rottenness and dead men’s bones.

From all this it will be seen what behoved to be Christ’s method so far in dealing with the sin of the world. His object was to put it away, and to gain that end one of His first aims was to overthrow the influence of the Pharisees, who were hiding the truth from the popular view and rendering the nation indisposed to receive the message of the gospel which He had come to deliver.

It is very striking, however, and touching to notice that while Christ spoke with such scathing severity of those who, though they had the reputa-

tion of being holier than their neighbours, were making the law void by their expositions of it, He presented Himself under an aspect of extraordinary benignity toward those about whose sinfulness there was no doubt, and who made no pretence of being otherwise than what they seemed.

Thus it was made a ground of reproach against Him that He received sinners and ate with them. That He did so is certain. On the occasion of Matthew's call to the apostleship He attended the farewell feast which the new disciple made for his former associates, and, we are expressly told, there were many publicans and sinners in the company. We read also that when He called Zaccheus down from the sycamore-tree it was remarked of Him, to His discredit, that He had gone to be guest with a man which was a sinner. And when the woman from the street came into the Pharisee's house where He was dining and washed His feet with her tears, He did not spurn her from Him as if her presence had any polluting effect upon the food He was partaking of, but spoke of her with a kindness which broke her heart. The same spirit of compassion appeared in many other connections, as, for example, in the language which He addressed to the woman taken in adultery.

With all this His teaching was in entirest harmony. In the three parables of Luke xv. He represents the satisfaction which the holiest

of all beings were taking in His work. The stories of the lost sheep, the lost piece of money, and the prodigal son all spoke of one thing—the joy felt in heaven over repenting sinners. How much was there, too, in the answer which He gave to the question put to Him, “How often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? I say unto thee, not until seven times, but until seventy times seven.” And with regard to the inquiry of how much wrong He could be moved to forgive, some idea of that is given in the parable of the servant who refused to remit a debt of a hundred pence, but who himself was relieved to the extent of ten thousand talents.

In taking up the position which He did—that of frequenting the society of sinners in place of seeking the companionship of the professedly religious people of His day—Christ justified His practice by proclaiming the purpose of His mission. He had come into the world as a Physician. What was wrong with men was that they were sinners, and He had come to deliver them from their sins. Hence He went where His services were notoriously needed. “The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.” “I am come not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

So far, then, we see what was the general attitude towards sin which Christ took up during His ministry. He denounced the mischievous teaching of the Scribes and Pharisees

on the subject, and, along with this, He presented Himself under a gracious and benignant aspect in His dealings with sinners.

But now it remains for us to ask what specific means He used to save individual men from the evil. And here there were evidently three objects which He aimed at accomplishing. One was to remove the legal obstacles lying in the way of their deliverance. Another was the bringing home to them the conviction of sin, so as to make them sensible of their need of salvation. And a third was to persuade them of the existence of an open door through which "whosoever wills" may enter into the peace of God.

1. The removing of legal obstacles is that which is referred to in the description of the purpose of His mission in one of the Epistles. He came "to put away sin by *the sacrifice of Himself*." He had more than teaching to do when He undertook the work of redemption. He had personally to bear a burden under which all others would have sunk. What that was was indicated at the very outset of His career, when John the Baptist pointed to Him and said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." But He Himself defined once and again the greatest object of His life. "The Son of Man," He said, for example, "came to give His life a ransom for many." And that this did not mean merely that He was ready to become a martyr for their

sake is evident from another of His utterances : " I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down and have power to take it again." If the thought of atonement was not present in these passages, it is difficult to put any reasonable sense into them at all. But that propitiation was the idea in His mind was made increasingly plain as His end approached. Thus, at the table, when He instituted the ordinance which was to commemorate His death, He said, " This is My body which is broken for you. . . . This is My blood of the covenant which is shed for many unto the remission of sin." And here is how He summed up all His teaching after the resurrection : " Thus it is written that Christ should suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that *repentance and remission of sin should be preached in His Name unto all nations.*"

We may have different theories about the atonement, and, as the Scripture does not tell us all we might have wished to know upon the subject, it may be unwarrantable to dogmatise in favour of any particular view. But as to one point we may speak with a feeling of confidence—viz., that no gospel will ever give complete satisfaction to a consciously guilty man which does not speak of expiation for his sin. Even under such imperfect administrations as exist among men, it has ever been recognised that

when a law is outraged it is entitled to require the payment of a penalty. A profession of repentance, however sincere, is nowhere accepted in lieu of such a penalty. One who has committed a crime is always—where justice rules—held a prisoner until he has made the usual atonement for his offence. Society would soon fall to pieces if this condition of things were not upheld. Some allow themselves to imagine that a different order must prevail under the reign of God, and that He will forgive sinners in an offhand way if they only appear as penitents before Him. But it is difficult to find a reason why this should be the case. Such an arrangement would not be just. Speaking humanly, would it be safe? If any sinner is to be dismissed free from the bar of God, it must be because the law he has broken has been satisfied. But how is it to be satisfied? By the bearing of his own penalty? That is inconceivable. Hope is awakened only when we are told of One who came to bear the penalty in our room; and now no more than two alternatives really lie before us. Either we must abandon salvation as an impossibility—for none of us can ever atone for his own sin—or we must accept that gospel which tells of a Saviour who bore our sins in His own body to the tree.

It was a great work which Christ accomplished when, by His death, He removed legal obstacles which lay in the way of our salvation.

2. But there was another thing He had to do if sin was to be put away. Men required to have the burden of sin brought home to them, so as to move them to wish to get rid of it.

Some of the heathen nations to which the gospel has been offered have been found by missionaries to have no sense of sin whatever. To speak of a Saviour to them was discovered to be absolutely meaningless. They were not in the least conscious that they required either forgiveness or deliverance. It was necessary in their case to begin at a far lower stage than usual and to try to create the want which it was desired to supply.

That is, of course, an extreme condition of things, but it is very well known that even in countries where there is considerable light, a blindness, similar to that which exists in heathendom, is by no means uncommon, and Christ found it in His own time and country. What steps did He take to show sin in its true colours, and to influence His hearers to seek deliverance from it and entrance into a new and happier life?

One thing He did was to speak of its consequences in a way well fitted to alarm. A day of coming judgment was proclaimed, in which (He said) account would be taken not only of the actual transgressions of men, but of their shortcomings in the performance of duty. This future was so awful that the need of preparation for it now was most urgent, and no sacrifice was

to be considered too great to avoid a sentence of condemnation. "If thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from thee, for it is profitable to thee that one of thy members should perish and not thy whole body be cast into hell." Such words as these (and we know how many they were that He spoke) were well fitted to make those who heard them think of the danger of sin and to awaken in them desires for deliverance from the evil.

On the other hand, there was something that was winning in the life that He Himself led and which He commended to others. In Himself was exemplified the beauty of holiness. He was, in all respects, free from imperfection. He publicly challenged anyone to convince Him of sin. But it was not merely the absence of sin which distinguished Him. Here was a Man in whom there was a before-unheard-of combination of excellencies; One whose essential greatness was manifest, but who was accessible to the humblest; One who went about continually doing good, scattering blessings wherever He went, but who looked for no reward on account of His beneficence; One who was so fearless that He dared to take it upon Him to drive the traffickers out of the temple, but who took up little children into His arms and blessed them; One who denounced sin in terms of awful severity, but who spoke with an infinite tenderness to any sinner, however great, who cast himself upon His grace. A life like that was a living epistle,

presenting daily a model for imitation, and its influence must have been incalculable in the way of making men think of the striking contrast which exists between a course of sin and a course of righteousness.

But He did more than show them an attractive example. He sought to win them to God by His gracious invitations, of which one, we may say, has gone to the heart of humanity: "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest; take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls, for My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

And yet with all that He recognises the fact that for the awakening of those feelings which dispose men to welcome the gospel, there is need of a supernatural agency. When He was about to leave the world, and His disciples were filled with fear as to what might follow from His absence, He announced that His departure would be succeeded by another Comforter, who would more than make up for His own transference to another sphere. The Holy Ghost, He promised, would be sent, and "when He is come He will convince the world of sin." Not that it was then, for the first time, that the influence of the Spirit would be felt in the world. Whatever of real spiritual had appeared in human history was due to His operation. When the price of redemption had been paid, the fulness of the blessing was dispensed, but on the faith of its pay-

ment foretastes of the promised benefit had been often given. And that, after the resurrection so many as 120 disciples were found ready to draw together for prayer was proof enough that during the whole ministry of the Saviour the Holy Ghost had been at work, producing those convictions of sin which had led those believers to feel the preciousness of the gospel.

3. To be convinced of the evil and danger of sin and to be assured that there are no legal obstacles lying in the way of its removal—these were the great points gained. But of one thing more men require to be persuaded—that Christ has opened a door which no man can shut, and that through that door all who choose may enter into rest.

Has Christ power on earth to forgive sins? He Himself proved that He had, when He cured the paralytic. Said He to the woman taken in adultery, "Doth no man condemn thee? No man, Lord. Neither do I condemn thee. Go thy way." "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son." "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory and all the angels with Him, then shall He appear on the throne of His glory; and before Him shall be gathered all nations, and He shall separate them one from another as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats."

With Him, then, rests the prerogative of mercy, and a great step will be taken in the direction

of freeing the world from sin when there has been a general realisation of the fact that He has salvation to give and is willing to bestow it. He came to seek and to save that which was lost, and wherever the gospel is preached this is being told about Him—that He is waiting to be gracious.

“If any man thirst,” He cries, “let him come unto Me and drink.” “Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out.” “Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life.”

The benign compassion with which our Lord regarded sinful men grew more conspicuous, we may say, as He approached the end of His life.

He took three of His disciples into Gethsemane with Him in order that they might help to sustain Him in the hour of His agony, and they utterly failed to be of any service to Him in the circumstances. But He showed no bitterness against them in consequence. He did, indeed, say a word to Peter from whom something different might have been expected: “Couldst not thou watch with Me one hour?” Yet this rebuke was immediately followed by the suggestion of an excuse: “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Nor did He utter a word of complaint when, on the appearance of Judas with his band, the whole of His followers forsook Him and fled. From the first He knew what was to take place, and with a meekness which was never disturbed, He allowed Himself to be led

unresistingly—like a lamb to the slaughter—even to the cross. Not that this calmness was due to callousness or insensibility. The significant look which He cast back upon Peter, while His own trial was proceeding, and which went to the faithless apostle's heart, showed that He was fully awake to all that was transpiring. And, we may add, there are few more touching incidents recorded in the Gospels than that which tells how, immediately after the resurrection, an angel, acting no doubt by the direction of the risen Master, gave this command to the women: "Go your way, tell His disciples *and Peter* that He goeth before you into Galilee." No time was lost in assuring Peter that his position was understood, and that his sin which had cost him so many bitter tears was already forgiven and forgotten.

What Christ went through during the night of His arrest and next day will for ever be remembered as a very awful experience. Painters have tried to give representations of His trial before Pilate. The careless judge unaware of the seriousness of the case submitted to him—the furious and malignant vehemence of the accusers—the brutality of the soldiers—and the stupid fanaticism of the populace with their cruel cry of "Crucify Him! crucify Him!" all combined to make the occasion one in connection with which indignation might have been legitimate. But not a word of anger broke from His lips. Nor did He speak when the sentence

of condemnation was passed and steps were immediately taken to put it into execution. As He was being driven out to Calvary He became an object of pity to the women of Jerusalem who bewailed and lamented Him; but their tears awakened no sorrow on His own account. "Weep," He said, "not for Me, but for yourselves and for your children." And when at the last He was nailed to the tree He was able to look down with an infinite compassion on the multitude beneath Him and to pray, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

To crown all, He spoke to an individual sinner a word of comfort from the very cross itself. Of the two thieves who were crucified along with Him, one became a penitent. He admitted that in suffering the punishment which was being inflicted on him, he was only receiving the just reward of his evil deeds. But with this there came to him a revelation which showed the situation in a new and extraordinary light. He recognised in the stranger, who was hanging by his side, the Lord of Glory, and with a faith which was nothing less than sublime, he addressed to Him an amazing prayer: "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." Seen beneath the veil of sense, the sufferer was showing signs of a rapidly exhausting nature—seen with eyes which had been supernaturally opened, He was recognised as a King who was about to enter on His inheritance, and in this last capacity He was

appealed to. Nor was He addressed in vain. With the same love for sinners which He had always shown, and which grew brighter as He neared the end, He said to this suppliant, who had lived a life of crime and who repented only at the eleventh hour: "To-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise."

So He died. With His arms spread out as if He would welcome all this wicked world to His embrace, and proclaiming, as with His last breath, His readiness to receive even the chief of sinners, he yielded up the ghost. Thus at the very moment of His departure He was repeating the assurance which He had so often given in His lifetime: "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out."

CHAPTER XIII

SORROW

HE was Himself "a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief."

That He lived for over thirty years in an evil world like this is sufficient so far to account for His depression. King David said, long ago : "Rivers of water run down mine eyes because men keep not Thy law ;" and if even he, with all his shortcomings, was not able to look around without pain on the forgetfulness of God that was so common, it is easy to understand why Jesus Christ was so troubled, to whom all sin was always abhorrent.

But there was far more in His case than this. He bore to the cross the burden of the world's guilt. The chastisement of our peace was laid upon Him. And while toward the end of His life the weight of the curse was so terrible that, in an agony, He prayed thrice that, if it were possible, the cup might pass from Him, He must always have felt so keenly the bitterness of His lot as to be very often "sorrowful, even unto death."

This experience of His must have helped to qualify Him for the office which He was frequently required to fill. The Holy Ghost whose coming He promised and predicted was only "*another* Comforter." Before the Spirit came, there was a Paraclete in the world who had done much to relieve and mitigate human sorrow, and, indeed, one of the greatest things ever said about the Holy Ghost was that when He appeared He would more than make up for the Redeemer's absence. Christ Himself said that He had come not to send peace on earth, but a sword ; but that was only the first effect of His ministry. A further and a greater result was the bestowal of a peace passing understanding, and on the way to that end He was constantly giving foretastes of what would be when His kingdom had come to be established in the world.

The causes of trouble among men are very many, and it is interesting to notice how many examples of these are given in the gospel history, and how variously they were treated by the great Physician of Souls.

1. One to which we are sure the Beatitude, "*Blessed are they that mourn*," is directed, but which is not so often experienced as could be wished, is SORROW FOR SIN.

Instances of this have been already referred to. There was, for one, the case of Peter who, when he had realised what he had done in denying his Master went out and wept bitterly ; and

we meet another in the story of the woman of the city who stood behind the Lord as He supped, washing His feet with her tears and wiping them with the hairs of her head. The penitence of both was recognised, and both received the comfort that they needed. Peter's subsequent history showed that abundantly, while as for the woman, the manner of her treatment is expressly described. Her sins which were many were forgiven. Her great love was accepted as a sign of her faith and her sorrow. And she was sent away in the enjoyment of a peace which marked for her the beginning of a new and a better life. The stories tell how bitter the grief for sin may be, and by what means alone that grief can be removed.

2. Another more common cause of sorrow is that which is produced *when friends who are dear to us are laid on beds of sickness and seem threatened with dissolution.*

It is an affecting picture which we have of Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, who came to Jesus, and, falling at His feet, besought Him earnestly to come to his house. "*He had one only daughter, twelve years of age, and she lay a-dying.*" That must have been a sorrowful house from which the suppliant came, and his anxiety must have been great to move such a man to humble himself before One from whom all his instincts would dispose him to shrink. In our times of extremity, however, there is no

humiliation to which we are not willing to submit.

Almost as touching a scene is that which is presented to us when we see a Roman military officer, who has come all the way from Capernaum to Cana to seek Christ's intervention on behalf of his son who also was lying at the point of death. The Lord was not unwilling to respond to the appeal made to Him, but before replying He made as if He doubted about the centurion's state of mind and would spend some time in ascertaining how he felt as to certain points. "Except ye see signs and wonders," he said, "ye will not believe." But the distracted father had no heart for preliminary discussions or questionings. The only thing he could think of at the moment was the distress at home ; and with a pathetic earnestness he replied, "*Sir, come down ere my child die !*"

Trouble is no respecter of persons, nor is the great Sick Healer. Disease in Christ's day carried sorrow into synagogue and Roman barrack alike, and for all to whom it came there was but one sure remedy—that of carrying it to Jesus. In both cases His word caused the clouds to disperse and joy to come in place of mourning.

3. Sorrow, however, may often enter a house, and does often enter houses, in consequence of *sickness actually ending in death.*

The imagination has no difficulty in filling in the details of that story which St. Luke tells so

shortly. When the Saviour one day was about to enter the gate of Nain he met a company carrying to its last resting-place the body of a youth, who was the only son of a widowed mother. Who does not at once picture to himself that desolate home on which the blight of an unutterable sorrow has fallen? Of course immense sympathy was felt in the village for the bereaved. Great multitudes were showing this by attending the funeral. But what did all that avail to assuage the grief for a loss which was irreparable? While life remained there had been hope. No illness is so desperate that it cannot conceivably be overcome. But now that death had come, all was over—and there came to be for the widow nothing but desolation and despair. Here, however, appeared a Comforter. Jesus is not at the end of His resources even when death has come. He can turn the sorrows of the bereaved into joy by calling back to them their beloved even from the very grave. At His word the young man on the bier sat up—he was delivered back again alive into his mother's arms—and although the story, as we have it, ends there, it is easy to follow them both in thought into their house, and to see them rejoicing in the restoration of a companionship which they feared had been broken up for ever.

In this incident we have an illustration of what it is in Christ's power to do for the relief of those who are mourning the death of friends. He can actually bring back their banished, and

thus effectually remove the direct cause of the trouble. But although He did exercise that power on more than one occasion, it was not often on it that He relied when He sought to comfort the bereaved. There were other kinds of comfort which He was able to administer, and these specially deserve our attention in consideration of the fact that they may be employed, when the occasion arises, by ourselves.

(1) One is that which He offered to Martha when her brother Lazarus was lying in the grave.

It consisted, besides the sympathy which caused Him to weep, in His presenting to her a view of death which was fitted to deprive it of its terrors. "Your brother," said He, "shall rise again." The idea was so far consoling. It assured her that there was another life in which Lazarus would share. But the thought did not go deep enough to cheer the bereaved sister. It was soothing, but not enough to remove her present pain. "'I know,' she said, 'that he will rise again *at the resurrection*,' but then there is the existing separation. I shall never again see his face *on the earth*.'" So, to reach and relieve this trouble, Christ adds a new representation of what death is to a believer. To Him in effect, death (He says) is nonexistent. "I am the Resurrection and the Life . . . and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me *shall never die*." In other words, His teaching was this—that LIFE in its truest and highest sense is centred in

Himself, and that no such incident as that of the temporary severance of the soul from the body can ever avail to cut off those who love Him from that in which they have their being. "The souls of believers are, at their death, made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory, and *their bodies, being still united to Christ*, do rest in their graves until the resurrection."

How much of comfort the followers of Christ have had in all ages from the words which He addressed to Martha does not need to be said. From them alone can true consolation ever arise. Much otherwise may conceivably be said to cheer, but only when the fact is realised that "for those who sleep in Jesus there is no death," will the ability really come to say, "It is God's will; and being so, we would not have it otherwise."

(2) And yet, for some in certain circumstances, even this is not enough. The loss of friends on whom entire dependence has been placed, has at times been so overwhelming as to necessitate the addition of still other considerations.

We have in the gospel an example of how such considerations may be presented.

Our Lord had spoken to His disciples of His own approaching departure, and as the result "sorrow filled their hearts." This, it is expressly said, was one of the causes of their sleep in the garden of Gethsemane when they ought to have been on the watch with their Master in the hour

of His agony. "*They slept,*" we are told, "*for sorrow.*" And what, then, did He say by way of helping them to bear the burden of their grief? He asked them to think of three things.

One was that the departure which they were lamenting would be *for their Lord's advantage*. "I leave the world," He said, "*and go to My Father.*"

Another consideration was that His going away would be even for *their own advantage*. If He went back to His Father, there would come in His room another Friend, who would more than make up for the lack of His continued presence with them. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away, for if I go not away the Comforter will not come to you, but if I go away I will send Him unto you. And when He is come He will convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment."

Further, He assured them, the separation which was impending was to be only temporary. "Ye now have sorrow," He said, "but *I will see you again* and your heart shall rejoice."

These considerations have in them an undying vitality. What Jesus said to His disciples in view of His own departure may equally be said to all who have been bereaved of believing friends. What has taken place is (i.) for the glory of God; (ii.) for the good of those to whom the affliction has come; and (iii.) the separation will be only for a time.

4. Another occasion of trouble sometimes arises when men are called upon to make *sacrifices which they see to be right, but to which they have a difficulty in bringing themselves to submit.*

Such was the position in which the young man of the story was put when he was required to give up his all in the world in the interest of his personal salvation. "What must I do," he asked, "to inherit eternal life?"

The first reply which was given to that question was one with which he found it easy to deal. He was satisfied that he had kept all the commandments from his youth up; and now he saw no difficulty in undertaking to observe the few which the Saviour specified. The test, in fact, was too simple. Something more, he was assured, was needed to secure the blessing on which he had set his heart. "What lack I yet?" was his further inquiry; and then came the answer which dissipated all his confidence and self-complacency at once: "Sell all that thou hast and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven."

The demand thus made upon him was more than he could face. "He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."

How natural the sorrow was we can easily see. Christ's answer had placed him between the horns of a terrible dilemma. Which was he to give up—the world, or eternal life? To gain the latter he had a very earnest desire, but the price he was asked to pay for it was tremendous.

It was to surrender all that made life here desirable, and to descend to a condition of anxiety and privation. It is not very surprising that he could not at once make up his mind to endure the sacrifice.

And yet his very distress was hopeful. He did not hastily say, "The demand is too great; I cannot submit to it." He went away, but he went away *sorrowful*, and as we follow him home we can easily imagine that the conflict continued and may ultimately have ended in his acceptance of the condition required.

Christ's demand upon this youth seems, on the face of it, to be extreme, but we may safely assume that the circumstances justified it, and what warrants us to say so much is the fact that He did not modify it even when He saw the risk of this interesting inquirer being lost to Him altogether. Most ordinary teachers would have tried to soften the trial or to explain the necessity for it. But no word was spoken to relieve the sorrow which had been produced. The young man was left to fight his own battle alone, and as we cannot but believe that the method adopted was the wisest, we cannot but entertain the hope that in the long run it proved effectual. The sorrow, it may be, was the prelude to better thoughts and a happier conclusion—and the youth, having made his choice, may have enlisted in the great army that was then forming and become one of Christ's most devoted followers.

5. Among the other trials to which men are sometimes subjected in this life, one of the greatest is that which arises from what appears to be *the unfaithfulness of trusted friends*. We can bear the opposition of enemies. It is no more, when it comes, than what we ought to have been prepared to expect. But when one turns against us with whom we have been on terms of affectionate intimacy, we are made to carry a heavier burden. *His* treachery is never easily borne.

Of such a cup of sorrow, however, Christ Himself was required to drink. It was, probably, with an air of outward composure that He said to His disciples, "All ye shall be offended because of Me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad"; and again, more pointedly to Peter, "This night before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice." But the pathetic complaint which He made to them in the garden, "Could not ye watch with Me one hour?" shows how much He counted on their sympathy. And a sword must have pierced through His heart when at the moment of His arrest, "they all forsook Him and fled." There was much in those days to weigh down His spirit, but this desertion, we are sure, did not tend to lighten the load.

It is instructive, however, to notice how He bore the trial. It did not embitter His feelings toward His disciples. He knew that the panic

which had seized them was not due to any radical change in their feelings toward Himself, but simply to the weakness of their human nature. For that He was able to make kindly allowance. And instead of condemning them hastily and harshly for their disloyalty, He gave them such intimations of His continued confidence in their affection as speedily brought them back again to His feet. The method He followed is not one which commends itself at once to men in general, but this is certain—that if it were oftener adopted there would be fewer permanent misunderstandings and separations in this world.

6. We may notice just one other source of trouble. It is that which arises when *men are made to stand aside as helpless spectators, while events are hastening toward a calamity which they are totally unable to avert.*

Such was the attitude of the women of Jerusalem, when they saw One, whom they believed to be innocent, hurried out toward the place of execution. They could do nothing to prevent the infliction of what they regarded as a wrong. They were witnesses of the outrage, but incapable of arresting it, and all they could do was to give voice to their sorrow—"They bewailed and lamented Him."

How deep or how intelligent their grief was we do not know, but it is something to remember, that Christ took notice of it and sought to divert it into a more proper channel.

"Daughters of Jerusalem," He said, "weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children."

Men have always been prone to miss the significance of events happening before their eyes. Their pity, for example, has often been expended on martyrs who were being hurried to the fire, when the persecutors at whose hands the martyrs were suffering were the real objects of compassion. And yet in certain circumstances grief for evils which cannot be averted is at once natural and excusable — as, for instance, was that to which our Lord Himself gave way when He looked down from the Mount of Olives on the doomed city of Jerusalem. Knowing the judgment which it provoked, and its inveterate impenitence, He wept over it and said, "If thou hadst known, even thou, the things which belong unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes." He knew what was in store for the city. He knew that its day of grace was past, and that nothing now could prevent its destruction, and a wave of grief passed over Him as He saw the flood coming to which further resistance was impossible.

Sorrow, then, was one of the surroundings with which Christ was made familiar. It presented itself to Him in many forms: as for sin, for sickness threatening death, for bereavements, for the enduring of intolerable sacrifices, for desertion on the part of friends, and for the

helpless onlooking at troubles which cannot be averted.

With these evils He dealt in various ways. Some of them He was able to remove in a manner in the exercise of which He could have no imitators—as when He forgave sin and raised the dead. But in general He acted as any wise counsellor might do, and from the methods He pursued we ourselves may learn much for our own guidance in similar circumstances.

CHAPTER XIV

DEATH

WE do not read of many instances of death being brought directly under our Lord's notice during the continuance of His ministry. Among the sick whom He healed there may have been not a few who were at the point of death when He restored them, and news was brought to Him immediately after it had occurred of the martyrdom of the Baptist. His attention was also called to the case of the men whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices, and to that of the others on whom the tower of Siloam fell. He was a close witness, too, of the last sufferings endured by the two malefactors who were crucified by His side. But except on these occasions, and at those other more memorable times when He met at the gate of Nain the widow's son, and stood at the bedside of Jairus' little daughter, and called Lazarus out of the grave, nothing is said to give us the impression that His path was often crossed by the last enemy.

It is to be noted, however, that whenever He did encounter death He presented Himself as its adversary and its Lord. All over the land there were those whom He had rescued from its embrace, and in at least three instances He had interposed to bring back to life individuals whom it had already within its grasp.

1. Looking at His treatment of death and His teaching about it, one thing is throughout made abundantly plain, viz., that in His view it does not end all for men. With Him the question is never that of "*Is there another life?*" but "*How will it be with us when that life comes?*" "To be or not to be?" was the problem of heathen philosophers; and, indeed, in all ages and in all countries there have been men who have denied the immortality of the soul, or have taken up the agnostic position and asserted that the future cannot be spoken of with any certainty. But with Christ there is no doubt or hesitation. That men live beyond the grave is assumed with a confidence in which there is no halting. And hence about this, there can be no question that the existence of another state is an unchallengeable point of Christian revelation. "The hour cometh when all that are in their graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth." "Before Him shall be gathered all nations."

2. But what did He say about that state into which we are to be all ushered by death?

(1) This, in the first place, He made plain—

that in the new state to which death will introduce all men a radical difference will be seen to take place between the condition of the righteous and that of the wicked. The separation between the two classes will be effected at once. When the beggar died he was taken to Abraham's bosom immediately. When the rich man died he immediately opened his eyes in hell. "To-day," said Jesus to the penitent thief—"to-day shalt thou be with Me in paradise." Judgment, then, is, in a sense, pronounced at the moment of death, and each man enters without a pause into the kind of life he is to live in eternity.

(2) But something more is done when the Son comes in the glory of His Father, and summons all the dead, both small and great, to appear before Him. Then the proceedings will be public and formal. From the opened books and in the hearing of the angels, each man will be tried, and sentences will be passed in accordance with the claims of justice. The righteous shall be separated from the wicked, as the sheep are separated from the goats in a shepherd's flock, and while to the one the Judge will say, "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world," to the others He will speak these words of doom: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Like awful representations of the future are given by Christ in other forms. We read, for

example, in the Gospels such words as these : " So shall it be in the end of the world. The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend and them which do iniquity ; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." And again : " The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father, with His angels, and then shall He reward every man according to his works." It is, too, the same idea to which expression is given in the parable. " When the even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers and give them their hire." So the end shall come. " All that are in the grave shall hear His voice, and shall come forth—they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation."

3. Death, then, being for men an event of such momentous interest, much and pointed attention is given to the subject of preparation for it.

(1) Effort is required if you are to escape the final sentence of condemnation. " Strive to enter in at the strait gate : for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able : for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat. Because strait is the gate

and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Entrance, however, is so all-important that no sacrifice should be grudged that needs to be made in order to its accomplishment. "If thy hand or thy foot offend thee [or cause thee to stumble in the way] cut them off and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire."

(2) And there should be no delay in the endeavour to make sure of our being within the gate. The parable of the ten virgins proclaims the possibility of a terrible contingency. Five of the virgins suffered the oil in their vessels to become exhausted, and when they went to procure a fresh supply, the bridal procession swept past, and the doors were shut behind it. Afterwards, when they knocked and sought admission, they found that their appeals were all in vain. They had come "too late." What makes the urgency in this connection so pressing is that life is always so uncertain, and that nothing is commoner than forgetfulness of the fact. So it was, for example, with the rich fool, who, finding himself possessed of all that was fitted to make the world enjoyable, gave himself up to dreams of endless pleasure, and to whom the doom came with such startling suddenness: "This night thy soul shall be required of thee."

4. The question, however, remains—What is

said in the Gospels as to the nature of the preparation required?

Upon one point there is the plainest possible teaching. It is that for any hope of happiness in a world to come, sinful men must turn to Jesus Christ. "I am the Way," He said, "the Truth, and the Life. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." "I am come that they might have life." "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of My hands." "He that hath the Son hath life, he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life." "Without Me ye can do nothing."

And equally clear and emphatic is the teaching as to how life in Christ is to be found. It is by being united to Him by faith. This fact is repeated over and over again in the evangelical record, so that it is a wonder how any unsophisticated reader can avoid recognising and accepting it. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth in Him* should not perish, but have everlasting life." "This is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on Him may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day." "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." "He that believeth on Him is not condemned, but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the only begotten Son of God."

Such a union to Christ when formed will give a new aspect to death altogether. It will, in fact, virtually abolish it, and it will make its endurance, under certain circumstances, an entirely subordinate consideration.

“Whosoever liveth and believeth in Me,” said the Master, “shall never die.” “If a man keep My sayings he shall never see death.”

There may occur the incident of the severance of the soul from the body, but when that takes place in the case of a believer, it has no effect in the way of suspending his true life. That in its very nature is “everlasting.” Christ is the Vine ; His people are the branches. “As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me ;” but “Because I live ye shall live also,” for “As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself.” And to the maintenance of that life there can be no interruption.

Looked at in this light, death cannot be regarded as invariably an insupportable evil. Indeed there frequently occur occasions when to seek to avoid it would be a fatal mistake. “Whosoever,” says Jesus, “will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it.” If death were always an enemy, its approach could never but be regarded as a misfortune. But there is something more important than our continuance in this present world, and that is the doing of the will and pro-

moting the honour of the Redeemer, and when these end and come into competition with death it must be cheerfully submitted to and even welcomed.

5. One other subject claims attention in this connection—that, namely, of Christ's own death. Many things of momentous interest are suggested to us about it in the evangelical narrative.

(1) Thus, in the first place, it is made evident that the manner in which His life was brought to an end was no surprise to Him. From the first He expected to be called on to suffer. How soon He began, in any way, to refer to His death, it is impossible to say, but long before He spoke plainly as to His future, indications as to its nature were given with more or less of explicitness. The time came, however, when He revealed to them what was coming without ambiguity or disguise. On the eve of His transfiguration He began, we are told, to show unto His disciples "how that He must go into Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and be killed." And this announcement was, in different forms, repeated again and again — as, for example, in the parable of the wicked husbandmen who put the heir to death in the hope of becoming possessed of his inheritance.

(2) This, too, is equally certain—that Jesus went forward to meet His death of His own free will. When the crisis of His life was approaching

He "stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." That He could have avoided arrest when He was taken, there can be no doubt. It was no secret to Him what Judas had done, and, knowing what He did, He might easily have sought safety in flight or in an appeal to the multitude which had come up to the feast from Galilee. When Pilate, too, urged Him to answer his questions by reminding Him that he had the power to condemn or release Him, He replied that He had only to express a wish and twelve legions of angels would appear for His deliverance. Deliberately, then, with His eyes open, and with a perfect understanding of what was about to happen, He surrendered Himself, without an effort, into the hands of His enemies and allowed them to work their will with Him. "I lay down My life," he said. "No man taketh it from Me. I lay it down of Myself."

(3) And yet when the end was drawing near He seemed to look forward to it with an extraordinary and, from one point of view, an inexplicable apprehension. There are some who see no mystery in the agony in the garden. What Christ then felt, they say, was nothing more than the natural shrinking of one to whom death was approaching and who was beginning to realise as He had not done before how terrible would be the pain of crucifixion. But if this was the whole explanation of the bloody sweat, He must at this time have possessed far less courage than has been shown by many an

ordinary martyr on his way to the stake. It is simply impossible to believe that there was no more in His experience than that. The prayer which He offered with such passionate earnestness that the cup of which He was called to drink might be removed, spoke of a burden the weight of which He alone knew and felt, and the calmness and composure with which afterwards He proceeded to the cross showed that in answer to the prayer an altogether peculiar strength had been vouchsafed to Him. What filled the cup was not the thought of bodily suffering, but the wrath of God for sin. This He had undertaken to endure in the room of a sinful world, and, although He delighted to do the will of God, this treading of the winepress alone was to Him a thing so awful that we cannot wonder at His distress in the immediate prospect of it. Yet for this He had come into the world. "The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many." "I lay down My life for the sheep." "This My blood of the New Testament which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

(4) But this has to be remembered—that in a sense peculiar to Himself His life and work did not end with His death.

When He announced to His disciples that He was to suffer many things in Jerusalem *and be killed*, He always added that He was to rise again; and what He thus predicted actually took place. On the third morning after the cruci-

fixion, He appeared to Mary Magdalene, who had come to the graveyard to pay a last tribute of respect to His remains, and afterwards He showed Himself alive after His passion by so many infallible signs that no one, whose mind is open to reasonable evidence, can doubt that the sepulchre was not allowed to retain Him in its embrace.

He rose again, then. And that is a fact whose significance cannot be exaggerated. He was then declared to be the Son of God with power. It implied, moreover, the achievement of a notable victory. He triumphed over death and the grave, and that in a way never before imagined. Previously to this, in the course of His ministry, He had more than once arrested the process of dissolution and restored to life for a time those in whom it had begun. But the restoration was in no case permanent. Lazarus and the widow's son were compelled later on to pay the debt of nature, and death had its triumph in the end. When Christ rose from the grave, however, He never died again. Death had no more dominion over him. And as the result a new aspect has been given to human life. Formerly death could only be thought of as the king of terrors. It was simply a monster devouring all. But now, since He conquered it who, in doing so, acted as the Second Adam, the federal head of a new human race, it has become possible to look into the sepulchre without shrinking, for light now lingers in it

and the fragrance of spices is there. If the Surety who undertook to pay the debt had failed to meet the obligation He would have been detained in durance for ever. His body would be "still lying in a Syrian grave." But when the prison doors were thrown open, and He was discharged as One on whom no other claim was possible, it came to be within the power of all believers to look at death but as the vestibule to the life eternal.

What makes death so little dreadful to many now is that its sting has been taken away. "The sting of death was sin, and the strength of sin was the law, but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." By His sacrifice sin has been atoned for—the Law has been satisfied—and now for those who believe in Him there is no condemnation.

For Himself, death was an emancipation. Before it came He had His limitations. But after it had been endured He rose to new heights and to the possession of a wider influence and an extended authority. "All power," He said, "is given to Me in heaven and on earth." In other words, the resources of universal empire were placed at His disposal. As to how He was to use these resources He gave during His ministry many indications. "The Son of Man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him." "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man, sitting on the right hand of power and

coming in the clouds of heaven." As judge of all He will sentence to perdition those who reject His gospel, but for His people He made provisions which speak with an affecting emphasis of His interest in their welfare. "Father," He prayed, "I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am that they may behold My glory." "In My Father's house," He said to His disciples, "are many mansions ; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." And with regard to the work He wished them to do after His departure, this was the promise which He made : "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel—and lo ! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

Jesus Christ was sentenced to death by a human court of justice and was executed as a malefactor. What was His crime? It was that He claimed to be "the Christ the Son of God." This was proclaimed by His judge to be blasphemy, and for that, under the Jewish law, there was but one punishment. If He was not the Son of God, He said of Himself what was not true, and was an impostor—a supposition which His whole history shows to be absurd. Here, then, is a great mystery—a mystery to which we have no key but in the dispensation of grace made known to us in the gospel. Salvation was accomplished by the death of the Son of God, and when He was lifted up on the cross the process began of drawing all men unto Him.



